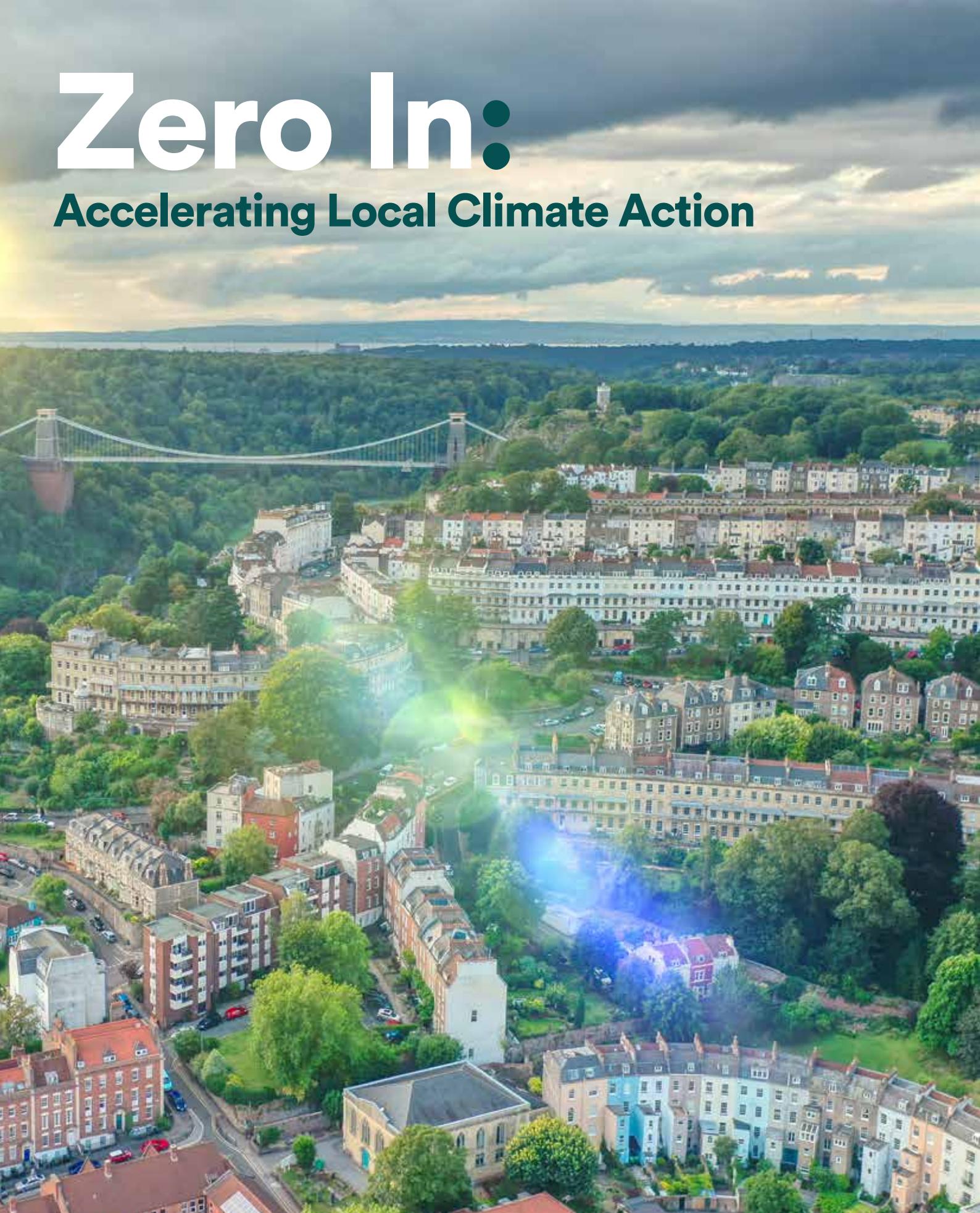


# Zero In:

## Accelerating Local Climate Action



UK:  
100

MISSION ZERO  
COALITION



Wind turbines in the  
British countryside

# About us:

## ABOUT MISSION ZERO COALITION

Mission Zero Coalition was launched in March 2023 to build momentum from the Independent Review of Net Zero. It provides a platform for exchanging insights, experiences and ideas on Net Zero policy development for the UK.

The Coalition brings together key stakeholders within 'Mission Zero Networks', which are based on the ten missions laid out in the Independent Review that are critical to the UK meeting its Net Zero commitments. Each network aims to highlight the issues and challenges of the stakeholders involved in delivering Net Zero and works towards providing clarity on potential solutions. Through this, the Mission Zero Coalition endeavours to ensure the UK will meet its Net Zero commitments in a manner which supports a healthy economy and societal well-being.

## ABOUT UK100

UK100 is a network of local leaders who have pledged to lead a rapid transition to Net Zero with Clean Air in their communities ahead of the government's legal target. UK100's primary purpose is to support a local-led rapid transition to Net Zero.

We do this through collaboration. To accelerate action, we believe in bringing together the most influential leaders across the country to learn together and agree on priorities for legislative and regulatory change while empowering them to engage with national decision-makers. We provide our network with the knowledge, tools and connections to make this happen.

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Local and regional  
elections take place  
on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2024



**POLLING  
STATION**

# Executive Summary:

All politicians who are elected this year will have a pivotal role to play in delivering the UK's climate ambitions. It will be under their stewardship that the UK will either meet its emissions reduction targets of 68% on 1990s levels by 2030 - as set out in our Nationally Determined Contribution to the United Nations - or it will fail. And if we fail to deliver the necessary reductions now, our ambition to reach Net Zero emissions by 2050 becomes increasingly out of reach. The future of climate action and protecting our planet rests on the action we take now, and what we are able to deliver today, rather than on promises for the future and claims of delivery tomorrow.

One year on from the **Powers in Place** and **The Future is Local** reports, the UK's Net Zero transition is at a critical juncture. National progress is at risk of stalling while local ambitions remain hamstrung. As the UK approaches the 2024 local elections in May and the general election due by January 2025, devolution and the role of local authorities is under scrutiny. Local authorities have influence over sectors accounting for 82% of the nation's emissions.<sup>1</sup> While eight in 10 Britons are concerned about climate change, seven in 10 lack confidence in the UK's ability to meet its Net Zero goals.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, more people trust their town halls over Whitehall to take the action necessary to tackle climate change.<sup>3</sup>

The local and regional elections taking place on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 are, in this light, particularly important. Ten metro mayors and 2,600 councillors covering around 44% of the English population will be elected.<sup>4,5</sup> They will have the opportunity to make climate commitments made by their local areas and regions a reality. While many local authorities have declared a climate emergency, far too many have not been able to put in place the necessary policies and frameworks to meet the level of their ambition. Now is the time to step up locally and nationally. Councillors are

important agents of change who in reality are the politicians who actually deliver and implement the energy transition. It is councillors who agree or block planning decisions that will decide the sustainable future of their local area. It is councillors who help shape where new businesses and industries are established. It is councillors who help to deliver the public transport infrastructure and it is councillors who help provide the necessary coordination and cooperation at a local level needed to ensure the smooth running of communities and regions.

Councillors are the key to unlocking the gateway to Net Zero. **The Net Zero Review**, Mission Zero, was clear that local delivery of Net Zero was not only important, delivering Net Zero at lower cost and in a more productive fashion, it is essential. Without local engagement and delivery, Net Zero simply will not happen.

Of course, many decisions and policies are still required from central government to empower local politicians to take the decisions and deliver locally for their communities. Councils currently face significant obstacles, such as insufficient resources, limited decision-making power, and difficulties engaging communities. Their ability to drive the transition is hampered by a siloed, centralised policy landscape and severe financial constraints,<sup>6</sup> including a £4 billion funding gap exacerbated by the costs of competitive bidding rounds for short-term pots.<sup>7</sup> Efforts to overcome these barriers could unlock substantial economic and social benefits for communities while saving £140 billion compared to a one-size-fits-all national approach.<sup>8</sup> The Net Zero Review, along with the Future is Local and Powers in Place reports, set out how barriers on funding, planning and capacity and capability all need to be addressed. This report further highlights what needs to be delivered from government to ensure councillors and regional mayors have the powers needed to make change in their



communities happen. But there is much that councillors can deliver today, without waiting for the government to move. There are many examples of best practice out there, across the UK where councillors and communities have got on with the job and taken the initiative, delivering best practice examples. We now need to expand that best practice – by ensuring it becomes standardised and the new normal across the UK.

This report sets out policy recommendations and opportunities that councillors elected in May can implement in their local areas over the next five years. It also outlines what steps the government needs to take to help unlock that leadership. Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs), for example, are just one way in which councillors can deliver change and the energy transition rapidly - helping to demonstrate where inward investment can be made in their communities. All councillors should be committing to have in place a LAEP in their term of office.

Further, ahead of the May 2024 local elections, this report and the **Taking the heat out of local climate action** pledge urge all candidates to champion climate action as an issue that transcends party politics and to counter misinformation by

providing accurate, accessible information to residents. Meaningful public engagement that goes beyond tick-box consultations is highlighted as essential for bringing communities along with the transition. Local leaders, councillors and candidates are encouraged to sign the pledge committing them to collaborative, evidence-based climate action and robust engagement with residents and businesses to co-design local climate action plans that work for all.

For the class of 2024, the next generation of councillors and local leaders will be those upon whose shoulders Net Zero will either succeed or fail. We can and must ensure that they are given every opportunity to succeed.

*Chris Skidmore*

**Rt Hon Chris Skidmore OBE**  
Chair, Mission Zero Coalition

*Christopher Hammond*

**Christopher Hammond**  
Chief Executive, UK100

# Background:

Over 340 local authorities have declared a climate emergency, acknowledging that without imminent action, humanity is facing a crisis as a result of changing climatic conditions.<sup>9</sup> Almost two-thirds of councils in England aim to be carbon neutral before 2030,<sup>10</sup> the majority of councils in Scotland have set a Net Zero target for their own emissions, ranging from 2030-2045. 59% of councils in Scotland have set area-wide emissions targets.<sup>11</sup> Nineteen of 22 local authorities in Wales have declared a climate emergency, with 14 of these having a climate action plan.<sup>12</sup> Over half of local authorities in Northern Ireland have declared a climate emergency, with Derry City and Strabane Council committing to Net Zero by 2045.<sup>13,14</sup>

But the current national policy ‘framework’ is both siloed and highly centralised, with little oversight or capacity for knowledge sharing. A place-based approach would be more cost-effective, promote regional green growth and allow for local flexibility for community needs and interests. As such, ‘Net Zero and the Community’ was one of the six foundations that the Independent Review of Net Zero recognised as essential to delivering Net Zero nationally by 2050.

The Local Big Bang Mission was consequently set out as one of ten missions, identifying the challenges to local Net Zero delivery and recommendations to meet them. It is estimated that local authorities have powers or influence over roughly a third of emissions in their local areas and the vitality of a place-based approach to Net Zero was further conveyed in 2023 through the landmark UK100’s **Powers in Place** handbook and Mission Zero Coalition’s **The Future is Local** report, a message this report aims to urgently reiterate and update.<sup>15,16</sup>

The vital role of place-based Net Zero approaches is increasingly being recognised across the UK, with initiatives such as the Net Zero North West manifesto bringing together industry leaders, local authorities, and academic experts to outline



a transformative vision and roadmap for decarbonizing the North West region through tailored strategies spanning energy, innovation, skills, and more.<sup>17</sup>

However, despite the increased recognition, the Local Government Association’s (LGA) recently published survey revealed a lack of confidence in the current pace of action. While 97% of local government officers reported an official target for reaching Net Zero for either or both the authority and the area as a whole, 67% were very or fairly unconfident their authority would achieve its targets within the timescales set out in its strategy.

The findings also suggested a negative feeling towards support from central government, with 40% of respondents selecting “not at





Brighton Pier

◀ all” when asked to what extent has central government’s overall work with their local council on Net Zero given them confidence of achieving a ‘just transition’. Similarly, 90% disagreed that the funding schemes currently available for local government to help achieve Net Zero allowed their council to sufficiently fund their Net Zero strategy locally.<sup>18</sup> There is an estimated £4 billion shortfall in local authority finances,<sup>19</sup> with local authorities having spent £130 million since 2019 on applying for competitive funding pots.<sup>20</sup>

This year will see the biggest set of local, national and international elections in a generation and a critical democratic moment for Net Zero commitments by 2030 and beyond. The government’s recent call for more investment in new gas-fired power plants is alarming for the state of energy policy in the UK and would impact its ability to cut emissions in line with the country’s Net Zero targets. It has resulted in accusations that the government is encouraging a culture war on climate policy in the run up to the general election.

This is paired with a rise in misinformation,

with more than 50% of the UK100 network of climate ambitious local authorities having experienced misinformation campaigns targeting their commitment to ambitious climate action or specific climate interventions.

These campaigns have not always stayed online, and have, in some rare instances, resulted in death threats made against local leaders. Local and national leaders should aim to improve engagements with communities and not turn climate action into a divisive party-political campaign tool.

Local leaders require stability for effective future planning and local economic strategy development. Long-term certainty is vital, as businesses, talent, and public services hesitate to invest or commit without assurance of stable regulatory and policy landscapes. The uncertainty and instability from central government renders commitment and subsequent action on the local level more important than ever. This report is intended to provide those seeking elected office in May 2024 with the latest government policy positions and suggested priority areas of focus for their councils.



River Clyde,  
Glasgow

## The power of Net Zero for local leaders:

The following section reiterates why local Net Zero is not just a means to reduce emissions, it is also the quickest, most efficient, and most cost-effective path to a more prosperous green economy, which will benefit society and build resilience locally and nationally.

The UK Net Zero economy grew 9% in 2023, and, according to analysis from CBI economics, for every £1 million in GVA contributed by Net Zero businesses, nearly £2 million more was added through spillover effects. These opportunities are shown to benefit all regions in the UK, and present an opportunity to increase prosperity in more deprived communities and constituencies considered to be battlegrounds in the upcoming elections.<sup>21</sup>

With this in mind, local authorities are best placed to develop and implement Net Zero strategies based on knowledge of the context and capability of the area and its stakeholders, including the public, industry, and public sector businesses. This is important to make the strategy as effective as possible, in terms of emissions reductions as well as economic and societal benefits. UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) 2022 analysis in 'Accelerating Net Zero Delivery' found there is a powerful economic case for place-specific climate action. It simultaneously delivers the greatest energy savings and societal benefits at the

lowest cost.<sup>22</sup> Analysis by PwC and Innovate UK demonstrates that empowering local authorities to take tailored, place-based climate action would save £140bn compared to top-down national approaches to reaching the UK's Net Zero goals.<sup>23</sup> **The Future is Local** highlighted numerous examples of tangible benefits of local Net Zero. For example, community energy groups helped people save an estimated £3.35m on energy bills via energy efficiency initiatives in England in 2021.<sup>24</sup>

### Local authority climate action would save £140bn

Finally, the CBI's analysis showed the West Midlands, a region involved in the trailblazer deeper devolution deal,<sup>25</sup> saw the highest levels of Net Zero related FDI projects in 2022-23 with 34 FDI projects in the region over a year.<sup>26</sup> In Wales, the West Midlands and Yorkshire and The Humber Net Zero businesses are twice as productive as the respective regions' average industry.<sup>27</sup>

The evidence underscores that embracing local Net Zero initiatives not only drives emissions reduction, but also fosters economic prosperity and adds societal value, positioning local authorities as pivotal actors in maximising the benefits through tailored strategies.

# Local Net Zero progress since Powers in Place and The Future is Local:

Since the publication of **Powers in Place** and **The Future is Local** in 2023, the government published four new devolution deals in its 2023 Autumn Statement in Greater Lincolnshire, Hull and East Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Cornwall. This creates a total of 18 devolved areas within England. In March, following engagement with mayoral combined authorities, the government made amendments to the Level 4 devolution framework published in November 2023. Under this framework, available to existing Level 3 institutions, the government will consider devolving Net Zero funding, subject to the outcome of the trailblazing pilots committed to in the deeper devolution deals with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).<sup>28</sup>

As part of the Local Net Zero Accelerator Programme, DESNZ awarded WMCA £6.2 million to address the funding gap for Net Zero projects. This supports the development of Net Zero Neighbourhoods in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Coventry.<sup>29</sup> In October 2023, the government increased the Boiler Upgrade Scheme grant for air source and ground source heat pumps to £7,500, making it one of the most generous schemes of its kind in Europe.<sup>30</sup> This has fuelled a significant surge in demand for heat pumps. To further support ground source heat pumps, in March, it was announced that the capacity limit for shared ground loops under the scheme will be increased from 45kW to 300kW, enabling larger systems of up to around 25 properties.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to this, the government's response to the Boiler Upgrade Scheme Regulations consultation removes the previous requirement under the scheme to have no outstanding recommendations for loft or cavity wall insulation on a property's EPC in order to be eligible.<sup>32</sup> However, the

requirement to have a valid EPC generated within the last 10 years is being retained. This goes some way to addressing concerns raised by UK100 previously about the "perverse outcomes" the EPC requirements could have in deterring heat pump installations.

The Future Homes Standard (FHS) proposals published in December 2023 represent a much-needed improvement over the current status quo by aiming to ensure new homes are "zero carbon ready" through requirements for low-carbon heating like heat pumps and improved fabric efficiency standards.<sup>33</sup> By mandating low-carbon heating sources and better insulated, airtight building envelopes, the FHS would put new construction on a better trajectory towards Net Zero emissions compared to homes built under the existing 2021 building regulations.

UK100's response to the FHS consultation highlighted, however, that the proposed options did not go far enough in ensuring truly future-proof standards. Moreover, Innovate UK's Net Zero Living Programme, launched in December 2023, will provide seven local authorities between £2-5 million for practical demonstrator projects. These currently include projects in Bristol, Leicestershire, Liverpool, Lancashire, Peterborough, Orkney and the Shetlands, Rossendale and York.<sup>34</sup>

In March, the North East became the third region in England to be given deeper devolution powers, with a new North East mayor to be elected in May.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, it is evident that the effectiveness of place-based approaches is becoming increasingly recognised, with central government taking steps to further empower local authorities. However, more must be done and at a faster pace, no community or region of England can wait until 2030 which is the current government target for all parts of the nation to have a devolution deal.<sup>36</sup>

# Recommendations for Central Government:

The rationale for local Net Zero is clear, below are recommendations to government for empowering councils to accelerate climate progress through locally tailored solutions, as well as key immediate actions for local leaders. Key recommendations include establishing a joint central-local government delivery board to provide oversight and support, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and rolling out LAEP nationwide backed by adequate resources.

Retrofitting the nation's housing stock to be warm, energy efficient and ready for low-carbon heat is highlighted as a prime example of a challenge that requires a new partnership between local, regional and national government backed by long-term and non-competitive funding to councils.

## Local Energy

Local authority involvement in planning is increasingly referred to in central government guidance. In September 2023,

the UK national government announced that updates to national planning policy would allow local planning authorities to approve planning applications for onshore wind farms under certain conditions.<sup>38</sup> According to the most recent National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in December 2023, to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, plans should, among other criteria, “identify opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers”<sup>39</sup> and “local planning authorities should support community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy, including developments outside areas identified in local plans or other strategic policies that are being taken forward through neighbourhood planning.”<sup>40</sup>

Energy Systems Catapult have created and delivered LAEP, a data-driven and whole energy system, evidence-based approach that considers a range of technologies and scenarios and incorporates stakeholder data and knowledge. LAEP provides a common goal relating to emissions reductions for all stakeholders within the local area.

Almost 100 councils, approximately 25% of the total in England, have committed to pursuing a LAEP. Leading examples include Oxford, Peterborough,<sup>41</sup> Greater Manchester<sup>42</sup> and York and North Yorkshire.<sup>43,44</sup>

LAEPs are highly valuable for integrated, place-based energy planning, but ignored by the government with no formal place in the energy system. UKRI research shows a coordinated role out of LAEPs could reduce costs by over two-thirds

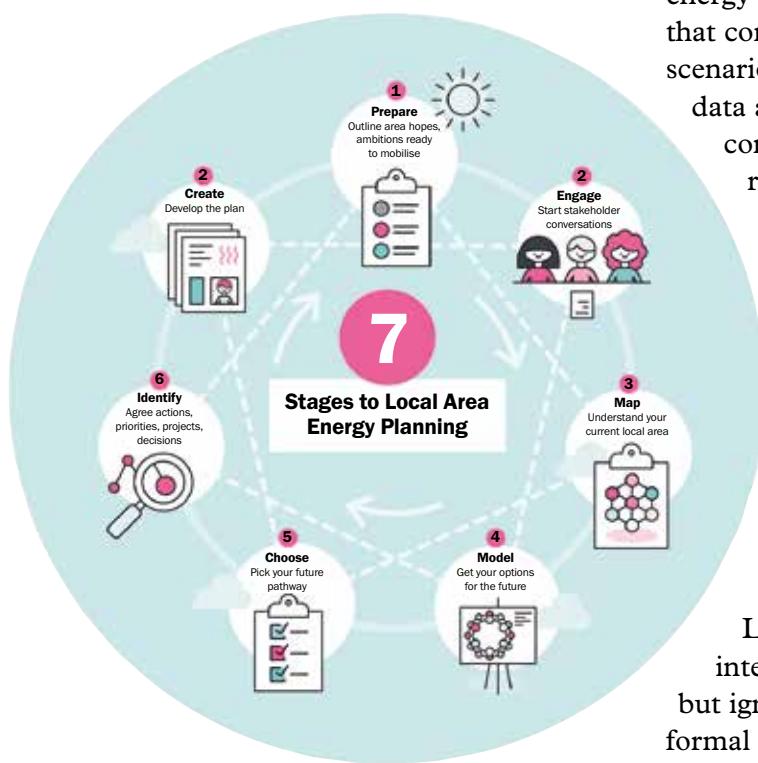


Figure 1. The 7 Stages to Local Area Energy Planning<sup>37</sup>



while almost doubling bill savings compared to one-size-fits-all national plans.<sup>45</sup>

The efficacy of some LAEPs has been affected by the lack of consistent national standards for the contents of these plans, with some local areas dissuaded by lack of certainty over government expectations.<sup>46</sup> According to the new Level 4 devolution framework, the government is considering the role of local area energy planning in delivering Net Zero and supporting efficient network planning, working closely with Ofgem and its review of local energy institutions and governance. As part of their ongoing work, the government and Ofgem will explore how local area energy plans can support local action, investment and delivery by energy system stakeholders.”<sup>47</sup>

## 6.5 million UK households living in fuel poverty

In 2021, the Welsh Government included local and regional planning into their national planning policy, highlighting the use of LAEP, stating: “using LAEP or other development plan evidence, local authorities should identify challenging, but achievable targets for renewable energy in local/regional plans and strategies or development plans.”<sup>48</sup>

Backing LAEPs is a low-cost and targeted way to unlock greater grid capacity, public and private sector collaboration, unlock more local renewable energy, strengthen energy infrastructure and create local green growth.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Non-competitive funding and resources should be provided for local authorities so that LAEPs can be developed and implemented, including for significant capacity building within local authorities.
- Give local authorities power to override national constraints on energy technology deployment such as on-shore wind when supported by local evidence, either in a LAEP or separately.

### Warm Homes

The UK has some of the oldest and leakiest housing stock in western Europe, with buildings accounting for around 17% of the UK’s emissions, making it the second largest source of emissions.<sup>49</sup> The number of excess winter deaths in the UK caused by cold and damp homes has increased by about 50% last winter (2022/2023) and we are now starting to see for the first time excess heat episodes and associated disruptions and deaths.<sup>50</sup> There are currently 6.5 million UK households living in fuel poverty.<sup>51</sup>

Local authorities face significant barriers in efforts to improve household energy efficiency and transition to clean, affordable heating. Issues include insufficient and short-term funding, lack of strong building standards, and a planning system not aligned with Net Zero goals. For example, the December 2023 Written Ministerial Statement on planning explicitly restricts the ability of local authorities to set ambitious energy efficiency standards.<sup>52</sup> As a result, progress on upgrading the nation’s ageing housing stock is far too slow, leaving residents with high bills and cold homes. In addition, U-turns or changes in strategy makes devising and executing plans challenging at a local level.

The Government has various energy efficiency schemes for homes including the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, Home Upgrade Grant, Boiler Upgrade Scheme, Great British Insulation scheme and Energy Company Obligation (ECO). However, most of these are underperforming, have inconsistent long-



term funding; and the national retrofit framework is siloed, centralised, and lacks oversight and knowledge sharing.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Lack of long-term funding is one of the major challenges and there is a need to urgently increase funding for retrofit and energy performance improvements to all buildings. We need a system co-produced with local government and the housing sector, which is place-based, non-competitive with longer timeframes, and bring forward targets to achieve higher standards across all building types and tenures.
- It is essential to embed a requirement for local planning authorities to prioritise the Climate Change Act in Planning Policy as a baseline and before the viability assessment to remove competition between climate mitigation and adaptation criteria and other “planning contributions.” Steps must be taken to ensure all Planning Inspectors fully understand the priority placed on climate change and apply it in their inspection decisions to ensure decision making is consistent and transparent.
- Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) do not provide a good representation of the carbon performance of a building in operation. The production of an EPC is a tick-box exercise based on the presence or absence of building and energy supply elements, rather than how well they perform. Thus, there is a need to review and revise the certificates.
- Support training providers and construction industry to rapidly invest in skills, supply chains and capacity to deliver zero carbon buildings. Allowing them to install appropriate retrofit measures to existing buildings without harming the building fabric. Support should be provided for local authorities to have the capacity to work alongside partners to develop and deliver large scale area-wide, multi-year retrofit programmes.
- Rapidly introduce zero carbon building standards for all buildings, and apply the proposed “in operation” energy and carbon performance requirement to homes as well as non-domestic buildings. Local authorities need the powers to set energy efficiency requirements on new buildings – this should also apply to existing commercial buildings to support the delivery of a consistent and long term plan on retrofitting.



## Engagement

Polling commissioned by UK100 found that the public think local authorities are well-placed to act on green issues. 40% agreed that local authorities were best placed to take action, compared to 30% choosing the central government. However, engagement needs to be conducted in a way that involves a cross-section of the public to get comprehensive inputs and feedback on their proposals.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- The national government should fund, guide, and support local authorities in conducting deliberative engagement on climate change. This could include establishing a central resource hub, offering training for local authority staff, and commissioning further research to evaluate the impact of different engagement methods.

## *Local Net Zero Delivery Framework*

The current structure of engagement between local and national and national engagement in England, launched with great fanfare after COP26, is not fit for purpose and broken. It must be reformed if local climate ambition is to be unlocked and the Government's national and international Net Zero targets are to be met. This is the year to fix it.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

A new, substantive framework and delivery structure is critical to achieve collaboration and a proper and lasting partnership between national and local and the following is a proposed structure -

- A joint Delivery Board and Delivery Unit connecting national government departments and local authorities. Tackles fragmentation, provides support, and escalates issues currently creating barriers.
- Agreement on appropriate level of decision making for Net Zero policies and interventions to maximise local



leadership yet retain accountability.

- Accessible data systems enabling information sharing, learning, tracking of local progress and feeding back into consistent policy improvement across local and national government.

## *Local Net Zero Data and Reporting Framework*

Building on the above recommendation to build accessible data systems, a key enabler of climate action is enabling accountability and scrutiny through up-to-date publication of climate strategies and emissions reporting.

This is in line with the findings of the Independent Review of Net Zero, that a lack of monitoring and reporting creates a barrier and limits accountability. The Scottish mandate for emissions reporting was highlighted as an effective policy,<sup>53</sup> whereby public bodies will be required to include "a target date for achieving zero direct emissions of greenhouse gases, or such other targets that demonstrate how the body is contributing to Scotland achieving its emissions reduction targets and targets for reducing indirect emissions of greenhouse gases."<sup>54</sup>

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- A Local Net Zero Data and Reporting Framework should be established, in order to provide consistency and increase integrity for reporting across local authorities. Local authorities should receive the necessary guidance and resources for implementation of such a framework.



## *Innovative Funding Frameworks*

Climate Emergency UK's recent report found councils developing and utilising innovative climate finance mechanisms to directly fund climate action perform better in reducing emissions.<sup>55</sup> The deeper devolution deals and expansion of devolved areas in England presents an opportunity for funding to be directed towards Net Zero projects, and at a quicker pace.

Bristol City Leap is a pioneering 20-year joint venture, 50% owned by Bristol City Council and 50% by Ameresco Ltd, which will accelerate green energy investment in Bristol, enabling the delivery of over £1 billion into Bristol's energy system.<sup>56</sup> In May 2018, the council published the City Leap Prospectus, outlining the council's vision for creating Bristol's future smart energy system. From May 8<sup>th</sup> 2018 to August 31<sup>st</sup> 2018, a window for expression of interest from organisations was opened, followed by a soft market test phase.<sup>57</sup>

In February, the five-year plan was unveiled, detailing a major infrastructure roll-out across the council's corporate estate and social housing, further develop the Bristol Heat Network, operated by Vattenfall Heat

UK, and deliver a range of large-scale renewables projects.<sup>58</sup>

Its effect is already taking place as Vattenfall Heat UK is now serving the equivalent of 5000 homes with heating and hot water via the Bristol Heat Network.<sup>59</sup>

The 3Ci Net Zero Investment Taskforce, in their recent report 'From Challenge to Opportunity: Unlocking a UK-wide Net Zero Investment Dividend', highlighted Bristol City Leap as an example of an innovative public-private partnership model that other local authorities could replicate. The Taskforce recommends establishing a "Net Zero City Leap" to scale this model to other cities and regions across the country, with the necessary finance to unlock inward private investment.<sup>60</sup>

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- Based on the outcome and lessons learnt from Bristol City Leap and those to emerge from York and North Yorkshire, the government should set out to establish Net Zero City Leap to scale this model of effective public-private partnership to other cities and regions across the country, with the necessary finance to subsequently unlock inward private investment.

# Action for Local Authorities:

There is an opportunity for local authorities to pioneer local climate action whilst waiting for further movement from the government, serving to bolster the case for place-based approaches. This section lays out key actions for local authorities to be implemented post election to accelerate local Net Zero.

## *Local Energy*

As well as the leading examples mentioned in the previous section, there are various other encouraging projects ongoing. Based on Local Area Energy Plans completed in each borough under the authority, Greater Manchester Combined Authority and 11 partners created a two-year project, The Greater Manchester Local Energy Market.<sup>61</sup>

It aims to create a smart local energy system across the 10 boroughs to meet the 2038 carbon neutrality target, combining local renewable supply, demand reduction, heat supply technologies and EV infrastructure.<sup>62</sup>

## Local Area Energy Plans vital to achieving Net Zero

Project LEO (Local Energy Oxfordshire) was a £40 million project involving local authorities, Low Carbon Hub, Distribution Network Operator (DNO), universities and businesses to trial different technical, market and system approaches for developing a smart local energy system. It ended in March 2023, with a key message emerging that Local Area Energy Plans are vital to achieving Net Zero.<sup>63</sup>

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- All councillors should commit to put a LAEP in place during their term of office to underpin the transition to Net Zero, committing the adequate resources for engagement with key stakeholders and mapping the local area post-election.

## *Warm Homes*

To reduce emissions from buildings, it is crucial to focus on three key actions: constructing new buildings to be Net Zero carbon, retrofitting existing buildings to minimise emissions and transition to low-carbon heat, and establishing low or zero carbon energy infrastructure for building energy supply.

However, current policies limit local authorities' ability to make any significant contribution to reducing emissions and retrofit of existing buildings has been woefully under-funded.

Some local authorities are taking ambitious action. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority Retrofit Plan is a comprehensive programme to develop the retrofit market, including action on skills, funding and finance, and delivery which will upgrade 60,000 homes per year.<sup>64</sup> There are measures aimed at the Willing to Pay households. GMCA is partnering with the Green Finance Institute to trial and scale financing solutions for home energy efficiency improvements.

Wiltshire Council's Housing Energy Efficiency Programme (HEEP) has set out the objective of getting all existing council housing properties up to EPC level B within 10 years.<sup>65</sup> They are doing this by reducing carbon emissions from Wiltshire's housing stock and the use of fossil fuels, improving the current poor energy performance standard of much of their council housing stock, reducing energy costs and energy consumption by the council tenants in council homes and mitigating the impacts of future energy price rises.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Higher standards incorporated into the building regulations would provide the quickest and most consistent route to zero carbon buildings. However, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) set

the policies that define the need for development and acceptable standards, provided these can be justified within the national policy landscape and can continue to demand higher standards.

- Local Authorities should maximise the use of existing funding and grants to implement projects to retrofit social housing.
- Local Authorities should adopt innovative case studies and practices from other regions to deliver warm homes for their residents.

## Engagement

The public will play a key role in the transition and employing effective engagement strategies will help local leaders and their councils build a deeper understanding of local challenges and solutions. It can help build trust and get public buy-in for a programme or policy early on, unlocking partnerships and setting it up for success. Many areas are starting to develop local Net Zero Partnerships or equivalents, bringing together local government, citizens, community organisations, the wider public sector and business to solve these issues together.

The Oh Yes! Net Zero Campaign was developed to accelerate emissions reductions in Hull towards its target to be carbon neutral by 2030. Hull City Council, the University of Hull, Future Humber and Reckitt came together discern how to bring about change through a coordinated local effort, helping local businesses from all sectors and of all sizes to reduce their carbon emissions, as well as creating greater awareness among schools, public bodies and the wider community about the importance of carbon reduction to Hull's future.<sup>66</sup>

The project has been warmly welcomed, exceeding its target for new members every month.<sup>67</sup>

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Local authorities should move beyond traditional “tick-box” engagement



exercises and embrace deliberative methods, such as citizens' assemblies and juries, to involve residents in co-designing climate policies. As demonstrated by the Local Climate Engagement (LCE) programme delivered by a partnership including UK100 and Involve, this can lead to more interactive, accessible, and locally-focused discussions, giving momentum to wider climate action. By properly engaging communities and businesses in the design of their places, councils can build trust, be ready for the debate, and inoculate their area against misinformation.

- Local authorities should follow best practice principles to ensure engagement is transparent, has integrity, involves the right number and types of people, treats participants with respect, gives priority to participants' discussions, and is reviewed and evaluated to improve practice. These principles can help local authorities maximise the benefits of deliberative engagement leading to increased trust among residents, better policy design, and enhanced public support for climate action.
- Engagement should be tailored to the specific circumstances of each local authority, considering the purpose, intended outcomes and the people who should be involved. As highlighted in the LCE programme, engagement should start with people's everyday concerns,





such as health, family, and finances, and make the link to climate change. This approach can help make climate change more tangible and relevant to residents' lives.

- Local authorities should collaborate with expert organisations such as Involve and the Consultation Institute to design and implement high-quality engagement processes. In addition local authorities could also learn from the successful case studies highlighted in the LCE programme and the University of Lancaster study, such as the citizens' juries in the London Borough of Camden and the Leeds Climate Change Citizens' Jury and adapt them to their local context.

## *Local Net Zero Data and Reporting Framework*

Improved and standardised monitoring and reporting will allow the benefits of local Net Zero strategies to be proven, encouraging public engagement and influencing central government to funnel funding.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- Local authorities should develop robust monitoring and evaluation strategies for providing transparency on emissions reductions and progress towards Net Zero strategies. This should include support for local businesses to measure their emissions, especially small organisations who may not have the resources available.

## *Innovative Funding Frameworks*

The recent 3Ci report emphasised the need for local authorities to commit to forming strategic partnerships, reducing reliance on government funding, following Bristol City Leap's lead. The report further suggests considering the development of a practical "Net Zero Investment Pipeline" checklist to assist partners in decision-making.<sup>68</sup> Bristol City Leap's process included developing a 'prospectus' for the desired local Net Zero energy system with key outcomes for citizens, the city and investors, as well as launching expressions of interest to engage in

open dialogue with potential partners.<sup>69</sup> The Net Zero North West manifesto advocates for forging innovative partnerships between the public and private sectors to unlock inward investment for decarbonisation across the region.<sup>70</sup> Further examples of innovative funding frameworks include Greater Manchester Combined Authority's partnership with Green Finance Institute to trial and scale green financing solutions. These include green mortgages and rental agreements to fund retrofit, alongside the planned launch of a local green bond for individuals and firms to invest in alongside public investment.<sup>71</sup>

Plymouth City Council uses a Carbon Offset Fund through Section 106 contributions to invest in the city's Natural Grid and in improvements to the energy efficiency of its housing stock.<sup>72</sup> On November 30<sup>th</sup> 2023, the Government committed £19 million to a Local Net Zero Accelerator Programme, with the aim of making it easier to secure private investment in a long-term, sustainable way. A key part of this announcement is £2 million in funding to support York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority to replicate Bristol's successful trailblazer approach.<sup>73</sup>

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Work with partners to develop a practical "Net Zero Investment Pipeline" checklist, building on 3Ci's National Net Zero Pipeline database. This checklist would assist local authorities in identifying and developing a pipeline of investable Net Zero projects, understanding what support is needed to bring them to investment readiness, and providing investors with sufficient scale of investable projects.
- Local authorities should commit to forming strategic regional partnerships, in turn reducing reliance on government funding, following the lead of Bristol City Leap. This includes prioritising developing a prospectus for the desired local Net Zero energy system post election and launching an expression of interest to accelerate discussions with potential partners.

# Conclusion:

This report has highlighted the vital role local authorities must play in accelerating the UK's transition to Net Zero. By leveraging their unique position to drive locally tailored climate action, councils can unlock substantial economic, social and environmental benefits for the communities they serve.

However, to fully realise this transformative potential, local authorities need an empowering framework of support from central Government – one that combines long-term funding, strengthened powers and a shared commitment to collaborative placemaking.

As local leaders step up to the responsibility of shaping a cleaner, healthier and fairer future, it is paramount that all parties and candidates in the forthcoming elections champion climate action as an issue that transcends partisan divides. By uniting

behind this common cause and working with residents to co-design local solutions, we can put communities in the driving seat of the Net Zero transition.

This report and its recommendations complements the pledge for local councillors

**- Taking the heat out of local climate**

**action.** By committing to this and the key actions laid out in this report, local leaders can send a powerful message about the importance of united, locally-led climate action that generate positive outcomes for both people and the planet.

The challenges ahead are significant, but so are the opportunities to build a cleaner, more vibrant, and prosperous future for all. By acting with boldness and vision, the next government can redefine what is possible – harnessing the boundless potential of local leadership to put the UK on the fast track to a Net Zero future.

## Key Actions:

### *For Local Authorities:*

- Commit to ambitious, evidence-based Net Zero action plans co-designed with local residents, publishing yearly progress
- Work collaboratively across regions and sectors, using their roles as conveners of place to deliver a joined-up local Net Zero ecosystem and influence area-wide emissions.
- Engage communities as valued partners in shaping and delivering a shared Net Zero vision
- Champion a transition with fairness at its heart to deliver positive social, economic and health outcomes for all
- Develop robust Local Area Energy Plans to underpin the transition to Net Zero

### *For Central Government:*

- Establish a central-local Net Zero Delivery Framework to define roles, objectives and collaboration
- Provide long-term, non-competitive Net Zero funding to all local authorities tied to outcomes and pace of delivery
- Devolve Net Zero powers to local leaders to unlock the full potential of integrated, place-based solutions
- Ensure all national Net Zero policies, programmes and funding are designed for effective local delivery
- Support local capacity-building and technical assistance to scale up Net Zero progress nationwide

# The Pledge:

## *Taking the heat out of local climate action:*

As leaders, cabinet members, councillors, and candidates seeking election to local and regional authorities, *we, the undersigned*, in the interests of promoting healthy local democracies and collaborative climate policymaking, commit to:

- **Rise** above party politics when addressing the climate crisis, recognising that it transcends political divides and requires collaborative action.
- **Support** an evidence-based, rational climate conversation by resisting the urge to drag climate policies into culture wars or use misinformation as a tool for division. We call on national politicians to do the same.
- **Acknowledge** the dangers associated with a rising tide of climate misinformation and endeavour to counter it by providing accurate, accessible information about climate policies and the need for urgent local action. And proactively communicate the benefits of these measures while addressing legitimate concerns.
- **Champion** the role of local authorities in driving the transition to Net Zero, working in partnership with central government, businesses, and civil society to deliver inclusive, equitable place-based solutions.
- **Engage** residents, civil society and businesses in the co-design of local climate action plans, using best practice guidance to enable meaningful participation in shaping the future of our communities.
- **Recognise** that local authorities are constrained and will need to make difficult decisions. While accountability is essential to local democracy, we will scrutinise with an understanding that our shared goal is to learn from our mistakes and advance climate action by improving delivery

[Sign Up To The Pledge Here](#)

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