



Local Government Association

a climate of change

summary version of the LGA Climate Change Commission report





"It is not overdramatic to say that the character and course of the coming century will be set by how we measure up to this challenge."

Rt Hon Gordon Brown, prime minister, November 2007

the background

a climate of change

The Local Government Association launched the Climate Change Commission in March 2007 to review local government's track record on climate change; make recommendations for local and central government and other stakeholders on how this response could be improved; and raise the profile of climate change and local government's role in responding to it.

This is a short summary version of the full report, which can be seen at <http://campaigns.lga.gov.uk/climatechange/home/>

The commissioners are: Professor John Chesshire OBE; Virginia Graham, sustainable energy policy adviser; David Green OBE, chief executive, UK Business Council for Sustainable Energy; Tony Hawkhead CBE, chief executive, Groundwork; Robert Light, leader, Kirklees Council; Philip Sellwood, chief executive, Energy Saving Trust; Simon Usher, sustainable development director, SERCO.

"The long-term nature of the climate change challenge demands a framework and disciplines that no government, of any political colour, will ever be able to fudge"

Rt Hon David Cameron MP,
leader of the Opposition,
March 2007

the climate change imperative

Tackling climate change must be at the heart of local government's vision for our communities. It must be the priority, now and for the foreseeable future. Our moral obligation is to mitigate the threat to our communities and to the world's poorest countries.

Local government's democratic mandate and its links with the public, private and voluntary sectors place it at the frontline in this challenge. Each council must address mitigation of the causes (by reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation (adapting to the climate change that is already taking place), delivering a reduction in carbon emissions of at least 26-32 per cent by 2020 and 60 per cent by 2050.

Until now, few councils have systematically built carbon reduction into their operations. Pressure on resources is no alibi for inaction: citizens have a right to expect council leadership and action on climate change.



“We are stealing the future from our children and grandchildren, and it is imperative that we put our own behaviour on a sustainable footing.”

Chris Huhne MP, Liberal Democrat shadow environment secretary,
November 2007



76 per cent of people in the UK agree that climate change will affect them, and **73 per cent** say local government should make tackling it a priority.

Energy Saving Trust/Ipsos MORI for the LGA

the statutory framework

making it happen

Our challenge to local government is that there should be no poor performers on climate change by the end of 2009. Local government, working with key national and local partners, should make reduction of carbon emissions and resilience to climate change a priority for every council and local strategic partnership (LSP). Councils can help cut carbon emissions by 150 million tonnes a year needed to meet government's 2020 climate change target. If councils were carbon neutral, it should save over five million tonnes a year.

A new statutory framework, including new powers on planning, could help councils rise to this challenge. The next two years must see a significant improvement in councils' response to climate change and a strong commitment within the new local area agreements (LAAs).

A positive response to the Climate Change Commission's proposals could help have the same outcome as a new statutory duty. For those councils who don't respond to climate change, legislation will be the only option. Progress should be reviewed by further meetings of the commission in 2008 and 2009.



the scientific evidence

Climate change is already happening, and managing its future impact requires a radical de-carbonisation of the economy and a move away from fossil fuels. UN research shows that most of the increase in average global temperatures over the past few decades is due to greenhouse gas emissions. Without immediate action, there is a real risk that we will reach a tipping point beyond which uncontrollable climate change will occur.

The Stern review in 2006 outlined the economic case for action. It estimated that if we do not act, the cost will be 5-20 per cent or more of global GDP each year; whereas the cost of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the worst impacts of climate change would be around one per cent of global GDP by 2050. The future security of energy supply is another pressing driver for reducing energy use.



The government has pledged to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions** by 26-32 per cent from 1990 levels by 2020, and by at least 60 per cent by 2050.

the case for action

national and international policy

Climate change is a top UK, European and international priority. The UK government has recognised the importance of the council role in policy statements including the climate change programme review, the local government white paper and the energy white paper. Central government's leadership and support is essential; it must also practice what it preaches and reduce its own carbon emissions.

Real progress on climate change needs bold local political ambition and leadership, transcending short-term pressures for the next few decades at least. It means embedding climate change at the heart of key priorities such as reducing crime, housing growth and renewal, raising educational attainment, improving health, and economic vitality.

Local government, together with LSPs, must decide the level of ambition for their areas: how to deliver their share of the national goal.

Local government's unique position

Local government has a frontline role in advocating low-carbon lifestyles. It can make a big difference through sustainable procurement, investment in infrastructure and buildings, waste management, renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable development and promoting walking, cycling and public transport.

Action must be rooted in ensuring economic, social and environmental well-being. Each council working with its LSP, should enshrine climate change action in the sustainable community strategy, local development framework, local transport plan and LAA. Some will go further, aiming to become carbon neutral; but local targets should be credible and underpinned with strategies and action plans. At sub-regional level, the multi-area agreement (MAA) can provide a focus for public sector action.

The full report sets out five areas where councils can make progress: adaptation, existing housing stock, planning, transport and procurement.





"Local authorities must strengthen leadership, build capacity, improve transparency and engage others to tackle climate change more effectively."

Climate Change Commission

the recommendations

leadership

The new performance management framework provides a rallying point for leadership. The number of LAAs with a climate change target will show how seriously councils and LSPs are taking climate change. Some councils have identified the importance of political leadership and executive champions throughout the authority, operating within a strategic framework that affords climate change priority.

We recommend that all councils assess the adaptations necessary to ensure the resilience of their buildings and infrastructure, and assess the scope for developing resilience as part of the regular process of managing assets. This is about future-proofing the public estate.

CLG and Defra should encourage effective adaptation, particularly in ensuring resilience through the planning process.

capacity

Councils need to harness all the capacity at their disposal - their powers, human and financial resources, data and third-party support. They will have to make fuller use of existing powers, such as being able to charge, trade and borrow prudently. Officers will need to develop new procedures and skills sets - for example, implementing new planning policies and building standards, and introducing sustainable procurement.

Given the increasing expectations placed on councils to respond to climate change, it makes sense to assess the existing financial and technical support. There is a strong case for increasing the level of support, particularly on adaptation.

We recommend that the LGA and Local Government Employers, consulting relevant bodies, conduct a needs analysis of the skills gaps that constrain more effective local action, and work towards closing them.



"The Nottingham Declaration needs strengthening - at present, it is a voluntary commitment backed by voluntary action."

Climate Change Commission

transparency

The climate change bill sets a clear national ambition but makes no provision for sector delivery of the targets. Our proposals for making local government action more transparent build on both the new performance management arrangements and the sector ownership of its own improvement.

Through the performance management framework, all LSPs should adopt climate change targets. The Audit Commission will play a key role by embedding sustainability in its use of the resources assessments that it

makes of local areas, and by assessing the effectiveness of responses.

Councils must challenge their own climate change response, perhaps using the new call for community action and the scrutiny function, and challenge those organisations currently taking no action.

The Nottingham Declaration on climate change should be strengthened to help councils move beyond an initial commitment to tackle climate change, to measurable actions in key areas such their own energy efficiency, sustainable procurement and reducing car use.

engagement

Local government has the unique democratic mandate to engage other organisations and the wider community in tackling climate change. The sector employs around 2.1 million people who should all adopt energy-efficient working practices. It has an annual procurement budget of around £50bn and a £17bn capital budget, which gives it significant power to influence the supply of energy-efficient goods and services.

Local government enjoys high levels of trust with citizens and regular contact with households through the provision of services, which provides an opportunity to drive the take-up of energy efficiency measures in the home.

But councils cannot do this alone. They need to engage with the public, private and community sectors, plus individuals themselves.

Councils, locally and nationally, need to work with key partners to drive up home energy efficiency, 'green' council work places and develop low carbon products and services.





Local Government Association

next steps

an historic opportunity

Local government has a unique opportunity. On an issue of such global importance, it must demonstrate the power of community leadership. In doing so, it can lay claim to the mantle of place shaping. To date, with notable exceptions, its response to climate change has been largely 'business as usual'.

The challenge is how we lever an historic shift in the response. There are many who are calling for a statutory duty. There are others who say that a more effective response will be locally determined. The next two years will be critical. As local councils, with their strategic partners, negotiate local area agreements and experiment with multi-area agreements, we will have hard evidence of their intentions and their progress.

now read the LGA Climate Change Commission's full report, available at <http://campaigns.lga.gov.uk/climatechange/home/>

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promoting better local government

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