

Briefing Note on Climate Emergency Declarations and Action Plans

1. Purpose and impact of Climate Emergency Declarations

The ultimate aim is for the Government to declare a national Climate Emergency with its ability to unlock all the required policy changes and funds for a rapid climate emergency response, but local councils can start the ball rolling by recognising the urgency of the issue, showing political commitment to addressing it and demonstrating successful climate emergency initiatives at the local level. Local awareness successes can then spread outwards to other local council areas and upwards.

The aims of getting councils to declare a climate emergency include:

- **Political commitment.** To secure high-level political commitment and give a public signal that councils recognise that there is a crisis requiring emergency action;
- **Action.** To translate commitment into action, for example, through the design and implementation of an emergency climate crisis action plan that sets targets and commits resources to climate mobilisation of sufficient scale and speed to do everything they can locally to protect and mitigate the worst effects of the climate and ecological emergency;
- **Public and stakeholder awareness and engagement.** For councils to play a proactive role in increasing awareness and participation of the public and of key stakeholders (businesses, schools, NHS etc) in action to address the climate emergency (publicising declaration, website, public meetings, establishment of climate commissions or boards, participation of public stakeholders in shaping and implementing action plan etc.);
- **Upward pressure.** Generating upward pressure on the Government to declare a climate emergency and put in place policies/measures needed for councils to achieve their targets.

According to a study by IGov of the impact of declarations made by 237 local authorities, there is evidence that **climate emergency declarations by councils already transforming, and potentially accelerating, local decarbonisation.** In particular through:

- setting a new, accelerated deadlines for a local carbon reduction targets;
- helping local authorities to move away from fragmented approaches to holistic planning for climate action and engagement across all areas, departments, and between different layers of gov through the development of action plans;
- the use of “soft power” by local authorities to engage local communities;
- through requests by councils (134 of 237) to national government requesting powers and resources to enable the achievement of local targets.¹

2. Which councils have already declared a climate emergency?

Climate Emergency UK (CE UK) have set a goal of every Council having declared and drawn up a plan for urgently decarbonising their activities by the end of the 2020.² So far, more than half the UK’s principal local authorities have declared a climate emergency: as of January 2020, 285 Councils are

¹ IGov was a research project within the University of Exeter’s Energy Policy Group which ran from 2012 to 2019 and looked at the level, type and speed of system change within the UK and internationally. For further information see, <http://projects.exeter.ac.uk/igov/about/about-igov/>. For blog out on outcomes of research on climate declarations see, IGov, [Climate Emergency Declarations Accelerating Decarbonisation? What 249 UK examples can tell us](#), 20 September 2019.

² This is linked to national ambitions (as is the case with XR) in the lead up to COP26, to get the UK Government to allow Councils to insist that developers build homes fit for the emergency; a massive investment in the skills needed for this transition; subsidies shifted from fossil fuels to renewables & low carbon heating etc (i.e. Council action is part of a broader strategy).

reported to have declared a climate emergency.³ According to research by IGov, this includes 21 out of 26 county councils.⁴

3 What does a climate emergency declaration consist of?

The IGov study of 237 UK local authorities found five common features in declarations:

- Expressions of willingness to collaborate with local people, organisations and business (included in 155 out of 237 declarations studied)
- Calls on national government to provide support and take action (133 out of 237)
- Commitments to start development of action plan or report (212 out of 237)
- Targets of zero carbon (council or whole jurisdiction) (177 out of 237)
- Deadlines for decarbonisation target (159 out of 237). Deadlines ranged from 2023 to 2050, but the majority aim for 2030 i.e. 20 years ahead of the Government target.

The research found two major groups: Group 1 whose CE declarations set out a plan and have a deadline for decarbonisation,⁵ and Group 2 those which lack a plan, a deadline, or both.⁶ A third group (Group 3) reported to have declared a climate emergency but about which there is no discoverable information.⁷ All declarations in Group 1 (i.e. current Gold Standard) set the development of a plan in action, 72% of these also set a deadline for a report back to the Council. 72% of the Group 2 declarations have a plan but no deadline, 11 have a deadline but no clear process for making a plan, and 17% lack both.⁸

The Center for Alternative Technology (CAT) advocates that climate emergency declarations include a commitment to planning and delivering the necessary actions with a clear timeline to a net zero end point. It notes that some communities have called for a combined climate and biodiversity emergency declaration. According to CAT, **once successful, a council declaration offers civic ownership of the climate emergency planning process, so widening its engagement, resources and influence.**⁹

4 Action plans and processes for arriving at them

It is not clear how many declarations have been translated into action plans so far. According to CE UK, only 35 Action Plans of varying degrees of effectiveness, have been located.¹⁰ The IGov research suggests there may be more. However, the relatively low rate of translation of declarations into action plans shows the importance of a) ensuring that there is a time-bound commitment in the declaration to drawing up an action plan b) follow-up advocacy to ensure that an action plan is delivered.

³ The 285 figure comes from Climate Action UK, [January 2020 Newsletter](#), but their database also seems to include non-binding declarations as per WSCC plus is not up to date, so figure needs treating with a bit of caution. See CE UK, List of Councils who have declared a climate emergency, 21 October 2019, accessed 20 January 2020, <https://www.climateemergency.uk/blog/list-of-councils/>

⁴ IGov was a research project within the University of Exeter's Energy Policy Group which ran from 2012 to 2019 and looked at the level, type and speed of system change within the UK and internationally. For further information see, <http://projects.exeter.ac.uk/igov/about/about-igov/>

⁵ Comprising 149 of the local authorities (60%) studied.

⁶ Comprising 88 other declarations (35%) studied.

⁷ Comprising 12 of the local authorities (5%) studied.

⁸ IGov, Climate Emergency Declarations Accelerating Decarbonisation? What 249 UK examples can tell us, 20 September 2019.

⁹ CAT, [Zero Carbon Britain, Rising to the Climate Challenge](#), 2019.

¹⁰ www.climateemergency.uk/?mailpoet_router&endpoint=view_in_browser&action=view&data=WzMsMCwxMDY1LCIxYWNhb3hsMWw9rZjRjY2t3ODBrNHN3c3dnNG9rZ2NjdylsMywwXQ

There are different processes for delivering action plans depending on level of authority, resources etc. Examples of four approaches are contained in the appendix set up by the UK Parliament, Oxford City Council, Frome Town Council and the Leeds Climate Commission. Whatever the process, the CAT has come up with some useful guiding principles that are applicable to all:

- **Clear and open process:** The process should be as inclusive as possible. Local citizens, businesses, and community groups will better engage in required actions if their voices have been fully heard from the outset (i.e not just the usual suspects!).
- **Make it public:** Make a clear civic announcement of the declaration and launch the action planning process and timeline, calling for input from citizens, funders, experts and other key players. Use local and social media and presentations to universities, community groups, campaigners and policymakers, to create public engagement in building the plan.
- **Mapping:** Identify and engage relevant collaborators, e.g. local universities, industry, experts, non-governmental organisations, funders, young farmers, think tanks and citizen expertise etc (i.e. stakeholder mapping exercise).
- **Connect local:** The framing of any process should reflect what is unique or is already happening in the area. It should respect local needs, traditions and culture, linking to important local opportunities such as agriculture, health or local businesses.
- **Boundaries:** Be clear on what areas your action plan has responsibility for, working out who has control of what, and at which level.
- **Cross-fertilise:** Identify and build links with relevant research already underway.
- **Multi-solve:** Think strategically across disciplines and across your local mapping. Don't just think about projects, but consider which projects would bring about the most change (for least cost) and could leverage co-funding from other areas of public activity.
- **Tools:** There are now many councils out there making and delivering action plans, and many organisations are helping them with such work.
- **Resources:** Think about seeking initial kick-start funding for your 'project team' from key funding organisations, individuals and agencies. Even if there is little initial funding, the current wave of citizen commitment can unleash expert volunteer time for various groups. Delivery of the necessary actions must be publicly reflected in the council's annual budget.
- **Zero Carbon 'expert seminars':** Expert seminars can bring together a selection of leaders relevant to a working group. It is useful to have a high profile partner organisation to make the invitations, plus an independent facilitator.
- **Keep up the momentum:** Agree a timeline, including consultations and make key milestones public so everyone knows what's happening.
- **Celebrate:** Come together as a community to recognise key milestones and celebrate achievements!¹¹

¹¹ For full details see, CAT, [Zero Carbon Britain, Rising to the Climate Challenge](#), 2019.

Appendix: Examples of process used to develop action plans/recommendations¹²

1. Leeds

1.1 Climate Change Commission. In Sept-Nov 2019 the Leeds Climate Change Commission¹³ organised a Leeds Climate Change Citizen's Jury working with professional facilitators – Shared Future CiC. 25 were people recruited from all over Leeds to represent a “mini-public”. Over nine sessions the group was asked to address the question, “What should Leeds do about the emergency of climate change. For presentation of the 12 recommendations from the Jury see Youtube link.¹⁴

1.2 Leeds City Council also ran in 2019 the “Big Leeds Climate Conversation in 2019 in which council officers and volunteers engaged with residents about the climate emergency at more than 80 meetings and events across the city. The Conversation was aimed at The Big Leeds Climate Conversation aimed to raise awareness of the need to tackle climate change, find out what actions individuals would be willing to take, and explore what residents thought about a number of bold ideas to cut the city's greenhouse gas emissions engage with residents about the climate emergency and promote the consultation at. A mixed-method approach was taken that included online questionnaires, in-person, conversations, focus groups and social media. 7,835 individuals participated in one of the two official questionnaires. For a full description of the project and outcomes see footnote.¹⁵

2. Oxford

Oxford City Council, supported by Ipsos MORI, organised the Oxford Citizens Assembly on Climate Change. It was over two weekends (28-29 September 2019 and 19- 20 October 2019) and addressed the question: “The UK Government has legislation to reach ‘net zero’ carbon by 2050. Should Oxford be more proactive and seek to achieve ‘net zero’ sooner than 2050 and what trade-offs are we prepared to make?”

Within the broader question the Citizens Assembly addressed three themes, divided into five separate areas, the issue of biodiversity was considered within each of these subject areas.:

- How do we use less energy?
 - Buildings – how do we ensure our buildings are fit for the future?
 - Transport – how do we develop a sustainable zero-carbon transport system?
- How do we make more energy?

¹² Note: Climate Emergency UK is running a webinar on 02 March 2020 13:00-14:00 on Citizen's Juries: Peter Bryant from Shared Futures will give a presentation about the Citizen's Juries held in Leeds and being held in Lancaster, followed by a discussion. [Register here](#)

¹³ The Leeds Climate Commission was established in 2017 to help Leeds to make a positive choice on issues relating to energy, carbon, weather and climate. It brings together key organisations and actors from across the city and from the public, private and third sectors. It is chaired by Professor Andy Gouldson (University of Leeds), with the vice chair from Leeds City Council (Councillor Lisa Mulherin), with members being drawn from key organisations and groups from across the city to provide independent advice, foster projects, exchange ideas, monitor progress etc. For further information on Leeds Climate Commission, see <https://www.leedsclimate.org.uk/about-leeds-climate-commission>

¹⁴ www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVmm5Xjpsw&link_id=55&can_id=fee16e7c7e0f068c99eb9c5fa8c0c30b&source=email-uk-newsletter-7-read-at-your-own-risk&email_referrer=email_706117&email_subject=uk-newsletter-7-read-at-your-own-risk

¹⁵ <https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/documents/s198402/Climate%20Emergency%20Report%20Annex%20%20191219.pdf>

- How do we transform our energy system to ensure it comes from renewable sources?
- How do we improve environmental quality on the journey to net zero?
- Waste – How do we reduce our waste to deliver net zero?
- Offsetting – How could Oxford offset the emissions it can't reduce?

For full report and headline recommendations and City Council response see footnote.¹⁶

In this case, Ipsos MORI was appointed to undertake the recruitment of participants and provide overall facilitation for the Oxford Citizens Assembly on Climate Change. It involved a randomly-selected representative sample of 50 Oxford residents who learned about climate change and explored different options to cut carbon emissions through a combination of presentations from experts and facilitated workshops.

Oxford City Council also established an independent advisory group to provide governance and oversight of the Oxford Citizens Assembly on Climate Change. The advisory group included a councillor from each the main political parties on the City Council, as well as a representative of the Conservative Party, together with Oxford-based environment and democracy experts and representatives from local industry.¹⁷

3. Frome

Frome Town Council has an ongoing program of public engagement on the climate emergency. In November and December 2019, it hosted a series of free climate panels in November and December 2019 for people to develop ideas and solutions to enable the town to meet its climate emergency targets. The addressed the following themes:

- Energy, how can we reduce the amount we use and generate energy cleanly?¹⁸
- Transport, how can we reduce transport needs and air pollution?¹⁹
- Resources, how can we reduce the impact of the things we buy?²⁰
- Frome Town Council and Sustainable Frome.²¹

Going forward it has scheduled:

- With Sustainable Frome a free workshop to explore how we can talk to colleagues, family and friends about climate change.²²
- With the National Energy Association charity a session on free energy training. The training will cover domestic energy use, how to reduce energy bills and how to encourage and enable people to act on energy-related advice. The training is for anyone who wants to support people in their local community to reduce their energy bills and carbon emissions.²³

The Town Council also has a climate emergency page on its website.²⁴

¹⁶ For further details on advisory group see, www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20011/environment/1343/oxford_citizens_assembly_on_climate_change/2

¹⁷ For further details on advisory group see, www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20011/environment/1343/oxford_citizens_assembly_on_climate_change/2

¹⁸ [Climate Panel Presentation – Transport \(PDF, 6.85MB\)](#)

¹⁹ [Climate Panel Presentation – Transport \(PDF, 6.85MB\)](#)

²⁰ [Climate Panel Presentation – Resources \(PDF 6.85MB\)](#)

²¹ [Watch the recording of Rob Hopkin's talk on YouTube.](#)

²² <https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/nikki-jones-workshop/>

²³ <https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/free-energy-training>

²⁴ <https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/your-community/resilience/climate-emergency/>

4. UK Parliament. A Citizens' Assembly on combatting climate change is currently being hosted by six Commons Select Committees (Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; Environmental Audit; Housing, Communities and Local Government; Science and Technology; Transport; and Treasury). It is designed explore views on reaching net zero emissions by 2050 and is being facilitated by independent NGOs.²⁵

The Climate Assembly UK will have over 100 members, who together are representative of the UK population. These assembly members will come from 30,000 households randomly selected from across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The assembly members will meet over four weekends in Spring 2020. They will hear evidence on the choices the UK faces, discuss them, and make recommendations about what the UK should do to become net zero by 2050.²⁶

²⁵ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/business-energy-industrial-strategy/news-parliament-2017/citizens-assembly-17-19/>

²⁶ See, <https://www.climateassembly.uk/>