

Debate on technological and lifestyle efforts to address climate change and to meet the 2050 net zero carbon emissions target

House of Lords

Thursday 06 February 2020



KEY MESSAGES

- It is essential that, as a nation, we tackle climate change and protect our natural environment. We need to continue to improve air quality, protect against flooding, and ensure our transport, planning, waste and energy policies are environmentally sustainable.
- Technological and lifestyle efforts have an important role to play in addressing climate change and meeting the net zero target. But responsibility cannot rest with individuals alone. Compelling, appropriate and affordable sustainable alternatives must be available to them.
- Councils are best placed to respond to the public's growing concerns about climate change. At a local level they can bring together partners to deliver leadership and direction. It is important to recognise that as there is not a single solution, localised responses are needed to address individual local circumstances.
- As part of our sector-led improvement work, the LGA offers a wide range of support to help councils address the issues of climate change and environmental sustainability. These include a Behavioural Insights programme, a Leadership Essentials Programme, programmes to help councils innovate and address both efficiency and climate change, and an Acting on Climate Change councillor workbook.ⁱ
- Councils are already undertaking several projects to encourage behavioural shifts. For instance in transport they are supporting cycling, providing electric vehicle charging points and offering lower emissions public transport. Many councils are looking at how to increase recycling efforts and reduce waste sent to landfill.
- Transport contributes 30 per cent of the UK CO₂ emissions.ⁱⁱ We need to design places that encourage active travel and see a large-scale electrification of the vehicle fleet. This is a big challenge for councils to embrace, but we can only do so with long-term guaranteed infrastructure funding.
- Housing is another key area where we can make a significant contribution to net zero. The Government's preferred option for the proposed new Future Homes Standards does not go far enough to achieving this ambition, and may result in costly retrofitting to new dwellings in the future.
- We must also recognise that manufacturers and retailers have a key role to play, in accepting extended producer responsibility (EPR), minimising their impact and offering consumers viable alternatives.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Technological and lifestyle efforts have an important role to play in addressing climate change and meeting the net zero target, but responsibility cannot rest with individuals alone. Compelling, appropriate and affordable sustainable alternatives must be available to the general public to enable them to make sustainable choices.

Housing

Housing is a key area where technological and lifestyle efforts can contribute to net zero. Through their role in house building and planning, councils will be critical in helping to deliver this ambition.

The LGA welcomes the Government's recent proposals for new homes standards that will future-proof new build homes with low carbon heating and world-leading levels of energy efficiency. We also welcome the Government's manifesto commitment for a £3.8 billion capital Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

However, we have concerns that the Government's proposals do not go far enough. The residential sector alone accounts for an estimated 18 per cent of UK emissions and there is a huge potential to drive carbon reduction through this sector.ⁱⁱⁱ

The consultation on the Future Homes Standard proposes two options to uplift energy efficiency standards and requirements. The standards proposed in Government's preferred option are too low and will require costly retrofitting to those dwellings in the future. In addition, the Government has proposed to amend the Planning and Energy Act 2008 to restrict local planning authorities from setting higher energy efficiency standards for new homes. Councils have been driving forward housing standards and sustainable development and they should not be restricted in their ambitions.

We have further concerns that a 'direct electric' approach to powering our homes, as proposed in the consultation, risks resulting in significant additional demands on the existing electricity grid, impacting detrimentally on the supply of power, particularly in places where the capacity of existing networks are already stretched. Electrification of heat can be particularly challenging. There is a risk that it may become less dependable due to large seasonal and daily fluctuations in demand and an increase in overloading current grid capacity, unless there is sufficient capacity on the grid.

The National Infrastructure Strategy should also examine the case for capital funding for the delivery of new or retro-fitted environmentally friendly homes and commercial buildings. As a significant majority of the homes that will be in place by 2050 have already been built, this should include retro-fitting existing homes as well as new-builds.

Transport

Emissions from transport need to be reduced, as a sector it contributes 33 per cent of UK CO₂ emissions.^{iv} Decarbonising transport is a major challenge that councils need to embrace, but we can only do so with long-term guaranteed infrastructure funding. We recommend the Government immediately enact the recommendation of the National Infrastructure Assessment that councils have five-year guaranteed funding plans.^v

We commissioned the Institute for Transport Studies to investigate how local authorities could take rapid action in transport using the approach 'Avoid, Shift, Improve'. Avoid actions are those that reduce the amount of movement necessary

to participate in daily life. Shift actions will seek to encourage more walking, cycling and public transport use. Improve actions are about encouraging a move to less-polluting transportation for every mile driven, such as through electrification.

Buses will have a significant role to play in decarbonising transport, but for this to succeed services must be protected. Local buses are travelling almost 150 million fewer miles than they were 10 years ago, due to an increase in fares and a funding gap for the concessionary fares schemes. We are calling on the Government to use the forthcoming Budget to hand all councils oversight of local bus services so they can maintain and improve them, use it to fully fund the concessionary fares scheme and help to deliver action on climate change.

Decarbonising transport in rural networks will present an additional challenge as many of the solutions are more difficult and less economically viable in less densely populated rural transport networks. Solutions that can decarbonise urban network will not be practical in a rural context and councils will need to be locally led.

The Government has indicated that they want to see a large-scale electrification of the vehicle fleet. Councils will be a key partner in the roll out of this infrastructure, but as a sector local government cannot afford to be delivering the comprehensive network alone. There must be investment from private companies or national government.

Lastly, to reduce emissions, improve the nation's health and embrace new technology in a socially equitable way we need to design places that encourage active travel.

Waste & Recycling

Many councils are looking at how to increase recycling efforts and reduce waste sent to landfill. Some are also looking at single use plastic policies and how to make waste collection routes more efficient.^{vi}

Responsibility does not rest with the individual alone or councils. The Environment Bill included a commitment for retailers and manufacturers to pay for recycling and disposing of packaging in household waste. We welcome the commitment to do this but the next steps must provide clarity for local government on the full funding of costs.

Consultations around the Resources and Waste Strategy must deliver comprehensive change in producer behaviour. Responsibility must sit with producers to reduce the waste they create, and to pay for the full cost of the recycling and reuse of their waste. Potential plans to reduce the amount of waste sent abroad must be supported by Government funding to ensure that councils can afford to recycle material in the UK.

Sector-led Improvement

As part of our sector-led improvement work, the LGA offers a wide range of support to help councils address the issues of climate change and environmental sustainability, including:

- A Leadership Essentials programme on taking responsibility as a leader/portfolio holder after declaring a climate emergency; next dates 29 February - 1 March in Maidenhead.
- Programmes to help councils innovate and address both efficiency and climate change through our Design in the Public Sector, Behavioural insights, and Digital programmes.

- An ‘Acting on climate change’ councillor workbook designed to help councillors think about the roles, opportunities and drivers for council-led action on changing climate.
- Numerous case studies and best practice examples.
- Our New Conversation 2.0 guide to engaging dialogue with residents, from consultations through to people’s everyday interactions with their local authority, including on issues of climate change.
- Support from Local Partnerships, including their Re:fit programme helping councils implement energy efficiency and local energy generation measures to their buildings or their estate, to reduce carbon emissions and achieve savings.

ⁱ <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/climate-change>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/790626/2018-provisional-emissions-statistics-report.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2018 Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Provisional Figures, Statistical Release: National Statistics, March 2019.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/790626/2018-provisional-emissions-statistics-report.pdf

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/790626/2018-provisional-emissions-statistics-report.pdf

^v https://www.nic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CCS001_CCS0618917350-001_NIC-NIA_Accessible.pdf

^{vi} https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/mapping-and-geolocation-t-26a_0.pdf