



# A councillor's workbook on acting on climate change



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# Introduction

This workbook is a learning aid for councillors on the roles, opportunities and drivers for council-led action on the changing climate, both to reduce local carbon emissions and to build resilience to extreme weather. It sets out the benefits for local people and places – lower bills, opportunities to generate income, and how to avoid some of the damage costs from weather events.

It is relevant to all councillors at ward level – but also touches on some of the key opportunities in portfolio area. Further information can be obtained from the Local Government Association's (LGA) resources on key services for building resilience: flooding, energy efficiency and transport.

The workbook can be used as a standalone learning aid or alongside other material you may cover such as e-learning modules or sessions within your own council. As such, the workbook should serve more as a direction marker rather than a road map. The important thing is to think about the issues presented in the workbook, their relevance to your local setting, the people you serve and the council as a whole.

This workbook includes a number of features designed to help you think about the role that you and your council can play in creating a low carbon, climate-resilient community. It includes key facts, case studies and questions to help prompt your thinking on key areas:

- why the agenda matters
- the role you and your council can play, particularly around leadership in this area
- the opportunities for taking action, focusing on:
  - the economy
  - housing and planning
  - environment and transport

- health and social care
- finance.

In working through the material contained in this workbook you will encounter a number of features designed to help you think about your role in chairing meetings. These features are represented by the symbols shown below:



**Guidance** – this is used to indicate guidance, research, quotations, explanations and definitions that you may find helpful.



**Challenges** – these are questions or queries raised in the text which ask you to reflect on your role or approach – in essence, they are designed to be thought-provokers.



**Case studies** – these are 'pen pictures' of approaches used by councils elsewhere.



**Useful links** – these are signposts to sources of further information that may help with principles, processes, methods and approaches. A full list of useful additional information and support is also set out in the appendices to the workbook.

# Why does this agenda matter?

Action to cut carbon and increase resilience can save councils thousands of pounds on their energy bills while also avoiding millions of pounds of future costs that will be incurred if no adaptive actions are taken.

There are also economic benefits in providing low cost energy infrastructure for local businesses, and the potential for innovation in new technologies to provide a low carbon future.

Councils can work to ensure that their area benefits as much as possible from employment in this sector. Further economic benefits will accrue from helping people without jobs or on low incomes to heat homes affordably, freeing up spending power for other goods and services.

With energy bills on the increase, fuel poverty is also rising, and this costs the NHS around £1.4 billion a year. Tackling the causes of fuel poverty, rather than the symptoms, will result in this bill being reduced, making economic sense as well as increasing wellbeing.

There are also opportunities to avoid future costs by improving the resilience of council services to withstand the future climate – hotter, drier summers and greater risk of flooding.

Low carbon and renewable energy activities generated £43.1 billion turnover in 2015, accounting for 1.3 per cent of total UK non-financial turnover<sup>1</sup>.

LGA research showed that recent winter flooding caused damage to infrastructure such as bridges, road and drains in excess of £250 million<sup>2</sup>

1 UK environmental accounts: Low carbon and renewable energy economy survey, final estimates: 2015, ONS April 2017

2 <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/press-release-winter-flooding-nearly-ps250-million-damage-caused-roads-and-bridges-new>

The economic cost to the Leeds City Region from the December 2015 floods was estimated to be in excess of £0.5 billion.<sup>3</sup>

The Committee for Climate Change, an advisory body to Government, noted that while UK emissions fell 6 per cent in 2016 and are down 19 per cent since 2012, this progress has been dominated by the power sector. Carbon dioxide emissions from transport and buildings rose in 2015 and 2016.<sup>4</sup>



## Case study Northamptonshire County Council

The council has produced a flood toolkit for local residents and businesses. It brings together relevant information in one location, including flood risk maps, step-by-step guides on what to do during different stages of flooding – from preparation to recovery, community resilience guides and education packs for primary schools.

3 Leeds City Region Flood Review Report: <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News/Leeds%20City%20Region%20Flood%20Review%20Report%20-%20Executive%20Summary%20FINAL.pdf>

4 2017 Report to Parliament – Summary and recommendations, Committee for Climate Change

# What is the role of councils?

Councils can play a significant role in realising the benefits and opportunities of climate action in their area. They are ideally placed to bring agendas together to ensure 'win-win' outcomes for the local community.

In this sense climate action is not a 'new' or 'different' agenda.

Coordinating action to retrofit homes, for example, can help address fuel poverty, create local jobs, cut carbon and make homes more resilient to the effects of severe weather.

## Leadership

Councils have an important leadership role in creating low carbon and climate-resilient communities. Individual councillors also have an important leadership role. This role includes:

- offering vision and direction to local groups, and building support for that vision
- identifying and advocating opportunities to mainstream ownership and responsibility for climate action across the council
- participation in plan making and decisions on climate action
- representing local level concerns and perspectives to the council and other important local organisations
- encouraging and empowering residents and businesses to participate and act
- brokering agreements between different interests and partners, working across sectors to facilitate and encourage coordinated action.



### What is climate leadership?

- demonstrating leadership within the council, developing a vision and mainstreaming ownership and responsibility
- communication and engagement, listening and engaging with the community
- establishing partnerships for action
- making things happen, eg supporting local energy projects actively championing flood defence measures
- representing: advocating for change at national, regional and local levels, looking after the interests of the vulnerable
- empowering communities: providing support, funding, information and capacity
- transparency and accountability about goals, actions and progress against targets.

Councils have significant scope to influence emissions in residential buildings, surface transport and waste, which together account for 31 per cent of UK greenhouse gas emissions<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> 2015 UK Greenhouse gas emissions: final figures – statistical summary, BEIS



## Challenge 1

(a) What are the opportunities for showing leadership on climate action in your council area?

(b) What ward-level priorities could council action to create low-carbon, climate-resilient communities help address?

(c) What local organisations can you work with to help realise opportunities within your ward?

(d) What obstacles to action are there? How can they be overcome?

(e) What questions should I ask of my council decision-makers to help achieve change?

# What are the opportunities?

## Economy

Councils can work in a wide variety of ways to support the growth of a low carbon economy and ensure that businesses are less vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, delivering huge economic, social and environmental benefits.

Key opportunities include:

- supporting local economic growth through the development of a low carbon economic strategy that identifies local opportunities and supports the development of local jobs, knowledge and infrastructure
- helping local businesses to cut costs and increase competitiveness by working with them to cut energy, water and resource use
- boosting local employment by ensuring that practical training opportunities are provided in local colleges, including in energy assessment and the installation of solar panels.

Councils and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) are already engaged in a wide range of action to promote the low carbon economy – with the new freedoms available under the ‘general power of competence’ offering huge scope for action



### Case study

Peterborough Council’s energy services company ‘Blue Sky Peterborough Ltd’ is generating renewable energy and reducing energy consumption while generating income and creating financial benefits for the community<sup>6</sup>.



### Challenge 2

How will your local economy be affected by the changing climate?

How can the council improve local resilience and support local businesses to plan for extreme weather?

What are the strengths, opportunities and natural advantages for developing the low carbon sector in your ward and the wider local area?

What could you do to support low carbon activity in your ward?

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/saving-through-energy>



# Housing and planning

There are major opportunities for councils to support local growth and improve people's lives by making improvements to the local housing stock, setting the framework for development in local plans and by working with local partners to support those most vulnerable. These include:

- saving money for the council and local people by ensuring that local homes, businesses and public buildings use energy and water efficiently
- helping the most vulnerable by understanding who is most at risk from fuel poverty and the impacts of extreme weather such as flooding, over-heating and cold
- boosting the local economy by creating new demand for low-carbon and resilient goods and services and helping to make places safer to invest in
- generating income for the council: making the most of the council's natural resources and assets to generate power.



## Case study Kirklees Council

### Affordable heat for all

The council is working to ensure all residents can afford to heat their homes. More than 50,000 homes have been improved to-date. Total benefits by 2050 are estimated to be £250 million from an initial investment of £11 million from the council plus £10 million from the energy suppliers.



## Case study Islington Council

The Council's Bunhill Heat and Power Network uses heat created as a byproduct of generating electricity to heat homes, the baths and leisure centres making it more efficient, cheaper and greener. It is bringing cheaper energy to over 700 homes<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.islington.gov.uk/energy-and-pollution/energy/bunhill-heat-network>



## Challenge 3

How will your local economy be affected by the changing climate?

How will your local area be affected by the changing climate and what impacts could this have on local homes and businesses?

(b) What policies are in place to:

- ensure new development is low carbon?
- encourage renewable energy generation?
- ensure new development is resilient to climate impacts like flooding, heat wave, or reduced water availability?
- encourage existing buildings to be retrofitted with measures that cut carbon and increase resilience?

(c) How could you and the council work with community organisations within the area to ensure communities are primed to take advantage of funding to install energy saving measures, for example support from energy companies for people on low incomes?



# Environment and transport

Councils can improve local health and well-being and encourage inward investment by promoting sustainable transport and a clean environment. Many measures can also provide low cost protection from extreme weather events.

Opportunities include:

- building the resilience of your own estate through appropriate tree planting, water harvesting, use of sustainable drainage and natural shading
- using the planning system to reduce the need to travel and promote cycling, walking and public transport
- promoting green and blue infrastructure by supporting investment natural solutions that will help protect against extreme weather events.



## Case study Devon County Council

### Building community resilience

The council worked in partnership with Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council and the Environment Agency to implement a package of measures to improve local resilience in 24 communities, including establishing and training volunteer 'Flood Warden' groups.

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/floodriskmanagement/flood-resilience/>



## Case study Stroud District Council

### Rural sustainable drainage project

The council is working with local community flood groups, land owners, farmers and partner organisations to implement a range of measures that will reduce flood risk but also improve water quality and enhance the biodiversity of the streams, brooks and the wider River Frome catchment.

<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/environment/flooding-and-drainage/stroud-rural-sustainable-drainage-rsuds-project>



## Case study Bristol City Council – promoting active travel

Bristol are seeking to make trips by bike the natural choice for their increasing number of commuters in order to tackle congestion and reduce emissions. Bristol have committed to:

- consulting on shared use routes; to resolve some of the key issues they are focusing on delivering segregated infrastructure for cyclists wherever possible
- improving legibility in shared use areas to make it clearer to those on bike and foot
- delivering improved on-street cycle parking, plus up to 20 new on street cycle hangars for residents who have difficulty parking their bike at home
- working closely with the Access Fund to ensure the promotion of new infrastructure to employees, schools and the wider community through new residential developments and their developed network of community groups
- providing loan bikes, cycle training and route planning
- working closely with planning colleagues to ensure that new cycling infrastructure is included in developments.



#### Challenge 4

a) What impacts could the changing climate have on the natural environment in your ward including local parks and green spaces, coastlines and rivers?

What local transport systems might be vulnerable to climate change in your area and what is being done to increase resilience?

What are the main sources of transport emissions in your area and how are these changing? How could these emissions be cut?

d) How are you engaging with the council and the community to encourage cycling and walking?

## Health and social care

There are major opportunities for councils to support local growth and improve people's lives and their health by making improvements to the local housing stock, setting the framework for development in local plans and by working with local partners to support the most vulnerable.

These include:

- helping households save money on their energy bills and keep warm by improving the energy efficiency of local homes
- helping the most vulnerable by identifying those most at risk from the impacts of extreme weather such as flooding, over-heating and cold
- working with partners to promote active, healthy lifestyles and to refer those at risk of fuel poverty to sources of help.



#### Case study

##### **Liverpool Council's Healthy Homes**

team provide free help and advice to local people who are struggling to pay their energy bills and heat their homes. The team operate from GP surgeries, hospital discharge wards and also provide advice on benefits. <http://liverpool.gov.uk/council/strategies-plans-and-policies/housing/healthy-homes-programme/healthy-homes-what-we-do/>

The proportion of households in England in fuel poverty in 2015 was estimated at 11.0 per cent. Levels are highest for people living in privately rented homes<sup>8</sup>.

8 Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report 2017, BEIS



## Challenge 5

How will your area be affected by the changing climate and what impact could this have on local health and health services? Are any health services or facilities particularly vulnerable?

Who is most vulnerable to extreme weather events in your ward? For example, are there older people's homes which may be vulnerable to increased flood-risk, heat waves or cold?

What impact could hotter temperatures have on local air quality and how could this affect local health?

How many households in your ward are in fuel poverty? What measures can be taken to reduce this number?

## Finance

Reducing energy use and avoiding damage costs from extreme weather like flooding makes real financial sense for councils.

Opportunities include:

- direct cost savings: through initiatives to reduce the council's use of energy and water and to minimise waste. Potential savings for low cost, quick payment energy efficiency measures range from £60,000 to £2.4 million a year for an individual council<sup>9</sup>
- income generation: by investing in revenue-generating technology such as microgeneration and decentralised energy, and creating public-private partnerships to minimise risk, maximise investment and boost returns
- pooling resources: working in partnership with others, sharing services and increasing your purchasing power
- external funding: maximising opportunities to bring in investment through external funding mechanisms
- protection from future costs: making sure you area is prepared to manage future weather-related costs such as the repair and clear-up from flooding and storm damage.



### Case study

#### Northumberland Council

The council worked with the Environment Agency to jointly deliver a £27 million flood alleviation scheme including a dam, upstream storage area and other flood protection measures to reduce flood risk to around 1,000 properties in Morpeth.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/download-potential-energy-9f8.pdf>



### Case study Woking Borough Council

#### Generating income

Thameswey Energy Ltd (TEL) is an energy company owed by Woking Council. It was set up in May 2000 to build and operate an energy station in Woking town centre. TEL provide low carbon heating, cooling and electricity to buildings within Woking Town Centre, including the Civic Offices and has over 170 business and domestic customers who purchase their electricity and heat from the company's energy stations.



### Challenge 6

a) What impacts could the changing climate have on the natural environment in your ward including local What are the opportunities to save your council money (and reduce carbon emissions) by becoming more energy, water and resource efficient?

What are the opportunities for boosting income through local energy generation or other environmental infrastructure?

Is your council planning now to reduce the costs of future climate impacts in your ward and the wider area? Are planning policies in place to reduce the cost of future flood events and reduce insurance costs

# A final word

Action to create low carbon and climate-resilient communities can yield significant opportunities for councils and their communities. Coordinated action can help the deliver on a range of local priorities, improving health outcomes, saving the council money, creating jobs, boosting the local economy, enhancing the natural environment and strengthening local transport systems.

It is up to individual councillor to have the vision, commitment and drive to help the local area realising these benefits and opportunities of climate action in their area.



## Challenge 7

a) What impacts could the changing climate have? What three things will you do after completing this workbook to help your local community seize the opportunities that local climate action can bring?

1

2

3

# Appendix – sources of further information

## Further information

Climate Local is local government initiative to drive, inspire and support council action on carbon reduction and climate resilience, and support networking between councils. It was launched in June 2012 and provides an opportunity for councils to sign-up and make a public commitment to tackle climate change.

More information about Climate Local can be found on the LGA website [www.local.gov.uk/topics/environment-and-waste/climate-change](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/environment-and-waste/climate-change)

## Useful links

### **Carbon Trust**

Tools, guidance and support for measuring and reducing carbon emissions.

### **Energy Savings Trust**

Information on the energy saving, district heating, local housing and strategic energy planning.

### **Climate Change Risk Assessment**

National climate change risk assessment with links to regional summaries.

### **Cabinet Office**

General advice, resources and toolkits for improving community resilience.

### **Local Climate Impacts Profile**

An online tool to help local areas assess the impacts of current weather events, available from the Environment Agency's Climate Ready support service.

### **The potential for energy efficiency and renewable energy, LGA**

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/download-potential-energy-9f8.pdf>

## Useful websites

### **LGA resources on flooding**

[www.local.gov.uk/topics/civil-emergencies/flooding](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/civil-emergencies/flooding)

[www.carbontrust.com/resources](http://www.carbontrust.com/resources)

[www.energysavingtrust.org.uk](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk)

[www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/community-resilience](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/community-resilience)

### **LGA resources on transport**

<https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/transport>

<https://www.local.gov.uk/tackling-congestion>

<https://www.local.gov.uk/lga-survey-member-highways-authorities-cycling-and-walking>



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