

Briefing

At a time of massive budget cuts for councils, and the abolition of the local government performance framework on climate change, action on climate change is getting squeezed. Green Alliance research has found that an alarming two thirds of councils are scaling back or abolishing climate change programmes.

Despite this, councils with political commitment and a drive to innovate are continuing to make progress – getting their own estates in order; dedicating resources to maximising green investment; and giving strategic leadership to community-wide emissions reduction.

And there are big gains to be made. Retrofitting council buildings and social housing, green procurement and boosting recycling not only save money as energy costs spiral but bolster green products, skills and services in the local economy.

A massive 80 per cent of UK Climate Change Act emissions can be directly controlled or influenced by local authorities. So it really is in our homes and streets, villages, towns and cities where the battle over climate change will be won or lost. National Government has a critical role to play in unlocking the local action needed.

Councils around the country led by all political parties have united in calling for three things:

- **Clarity** about the scale of action needed in their area to help meet national Climate Change Act targets.
- **A duty** to help prioritise their strategic local leadership role in emissions reduction.
- **Financial, technical and political support** to deliver the step-change in action needed.

Councils have won significant support – from MPs and Peers in major debates in both Houses of Parliament; from business as diverse as B&Q to the Federation of Small Businesses; and most recently from an independent review by the Environmental Audit Select Committee.

We are very pleased that Government has now agreed to seek advice from the Committee on Climate Change. Friends of the Earth hopes that the Committee will be tasked with giving the guidance councils are asking for in relation to Climate Change Act targets. We also think they should be central to reviewing progress of the sector in rolling out the policies needed and meeting local targets.

Council progress in cutting local emissions should be reported to Parliament annually. There will be a strong case for **Government reviewing councils' request for a duty** on climate change and for more support if insufficient progress is made.

The story so far

Oct 2002: The **Nottingham Declaration** on climate change is launched. Over 90% of councils pledge to help meet national climate commitments through emissions cuts in their own operations and working with local partners on community climate change strategies. A bold political commitment that ultimately delivers limited action.

Oct 2005: The **C40 group** of major world cities is launched by London Mayor Ken Livingstone to tackle climate change and share pioneering ideas in the face of failed environmental leadership by the globe's Governments. 56 of the world's biggest cities are now working and competing to cut emissions.

Oct 2006: Government introduces the **first performance system** for council action on climate change in local authority areas (National Indicator 186). Two thirds of councils sign up to the voluntary system, although they set themselves extremely unchallenging targets.

Nov 2007: The Local Government Association Climate Change Commission acknowledge that not nearly enough council action to cut emissions is happening and say: **'Our unanimous view is that a statutory duty should be imposed on those councils that, within the next two years, do not respond to climate change.'**

Nov 2008: The **Climate Change Act** becomes law committing the UK to emissions reduction of at least 80% by 2050. Friends of the Earth celebrates a ground-breaking campaign success but pushes for rapid green policy roll-out nationwide to meet the targets.

June 2009: Friends of the Earth launches our **'Get Serious About CO2 campaign'**. We call for a clear target and a mandatory action plan for every local authority area to help meet Climate Change Act commitments. Early success includes grassroots activists working with trailblazing councils which commit to local emissions cuts of at least 40% by 2020. We mobilise councils to push for Government action.

Jan 2010: Government launches 9 **Local Carbon Framework** pilot schemes to explore ways for councils to cut carbon locally. There is strong competition to take part and Government commits to a nationwide roll-out of the initiative.

May 2010: The new Coalition Government announces plans to **abolish the local government performance framework** including National Indicator 186 through which councils had committed to cut per-capita emissions in their local areas.

June 2010: Tens of thousands of Friends of the Earth activists email Government when the Local Carbon Framework **pilot scheme is threatened**. DECC agree to retain it – but just for one year.

July 2010: Climate Change Minister Chris Huhne sets out a new **localist vision for councils and climate change** saying:

"We are tearing down the structure of centrally set targets, and returning genuine power to local authorities... But at the same [we have a] legally binding requirement to reduce the UK's carbon emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. We need to construct a new partnership between local and central government, which enables us to meet these goals in the fastest and most cost-effective manner possible."



What you can do

1. Petition

Sign Friends of the Earth's new petition **asking Government to:**

- Ask the Committee on Climate Change to **advise specifically on the scale and type of action needed** in local authority areas to help meet each Climate Change Act national carbon budget.
- Deliver an **annual progress report** to Parliament which must include consideration of the need for a **climate change duty** and more support for councils.

Please sign the petition in your delegate pack and return it when you leave. Alternatively, please take it back to your council, company or institution.

2. New Nottingham Declaration

Support the new Nottingham Declaration to be an effective body of councils driving ambitious local action in line with the challenge of the Climate Change Act.

3. Local action

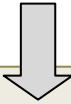
Make sure your council:

- Is cutting all energy waste in its own estate and is using procurement and planning powers to drive green products, skills and services in the local economy.
- Is delivering a strategic community-wide plan for emissions reduction in line with the Climate Change Act.

Further information

For further information and to support this campaign, please contact Liz Hutchins: liz.hutchins@foe.co.uk

References for the 'story so far', further briefings, and presentations, video highlights and a write up from today's conference will all be available at www.foe.co.uk/stepchange



Oct 2010: Friends of the Earth takes our campaign to all three party conferences. Climate Change Minister Greg Barker says: *"When you find the Federation of Small Business in alliance with Friends of the Earth you know it's time to sit up and take notice."*

Oct 2010: The Local Government Group makes an offer of cooperation in response to Chris Huhne's localism speech. They propose to re-launch the Nottingham Declaration. They agree to discuss local climate targets: *'The general LG Group position is that new duties from Government should be accompanied by new resources. If DECC is able to provide the resources for councils to meet nationally set local targets, then the Group could negotiate from this position.'*

Oct 2010: The Government announces its Comprehensive Spending Review. Local government funding from central Government is slashed by 28% in real terms up to 2014/15. Non-statutory work of councils comes under immediate pressure.

Nov 2010: Friends of the Earth mobilise **40 councils** led by all political parties to make their own 'offer' calling for **action on climate change to be a core duty of councils and for every local authority to have an action plan** to help meet Climate Change Act targets. The Federation of Small Businesses, the TUC, B&Q and others support the call.

March 2011: Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour peers and Lords Spiritual support our campaign asks in a lively **House of Lords debate**. Lord Teverson says: *"Local authorities are fundamental to helping to deliver our carbon targets nationally... There should be a statutory obligation on councils. The Climate Change Committee should have a local authority aspect."*

March-May 2011: Friends of the Earth and Stop Climate Chaos organise a nationwide tour of large public meetings in 30 constituencies - discussing with councils and lobbying MPs. The Conservative cabinet member for environment in David Cameron's local authority reflects a wide-spread view: *"I'm happy to see the Government introduce targets on the environment provided they are realistic. It is helpful if they are mandatory - it means no wriggle room and everyone in the council pulling together."* Cllr David Harvey, West Oxfordshire District Council

June 2011: The Committee on Climate Change raise concern in their Third Progress Report to Parliament: *'The previous government's system of national indicators has been abolished. Instead, a Memorandum of Understanding signed between DECC and the Local Government Group earlier this year sets out how central and local government will work together to help and encourage English local councils to reduce their emissions.'* **'[It is] unclear whether there are now enough incentives for emissions reductions across all local authorities.'**

June 2011: Labour table amendments to the Government Energy Bill for:

- i) Independent advice from the Committee on Climate Change about the scale and type of action needed by councils in their communities to help meet each UK carbon budget.
- ii) Action on climate change to become a core responsibility of every council – to develop community plans for action commensurate with the CCC advice.

August 2011: Councils nationwide write to Government requesting Committee on Climate Change advice. They respond to a Nottingham Declaration consultation saying signatories should commit to doing their bit locally to help meet Climate Change Act targets.

September 2011: Climate Minister Greg Barker announces that councils advice will be sought from the Committee on Climate Change. The scope of the advice is undecided.

September 2011: The Environmental Audit Select Committee review structures to encourage council action on climate change and conclude: *'A voluntary approach will not be enough to ensure that all local authorities make a full contribution to emissions reduction. Local authorities should be required to set emission reductions targets. The Government should task the Committee on Climate Change with supporting local authorities in setting such targets, and the Committee should be charged with monitoring progress against those targets. An annual review of performance by local authorities should be submitted to Parliament by Ministers, to present as full a picture as possible of emissions reduction performance.'*

October 2011: Green Alliance research finds that two thirds of councils are scaling back or abolishing climate change programmes¹ in response to austerity cuts and the abolition of national indicator 186.