



**Friends of
the Earth**

November 2010

Briefing

Assessment of the Local Government Group 'offer' on meeting the UK Climate Change Act commitments

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1. Introduction

Friends of the Earth strongly welcomed Climate Secretary Chris Huhne's challenge to local government in June 2010 to set out how it will do its bit to meet the UK Climate Change Act commitments. This showed Government leadership on the scale of the task it is committed to meeting, and a collaborative approach to solving it.

The Local Government Group, as well as individual councils, and a cross-party group of councils working with Friends of the Earth, has responded with constructive proposals about how to meet this challenge.

Friends of the Earth welcomes the commitment of the Local Government Group to support councils in playing a central role in helping the UK meet Climate Change Act Commitments.

This paper sets out Friends of the Earth's views on the Local Government Group offer. It aims to inform discussion about how to take forward locally-coordinated action on climate change.

We remain in close dialogue with the LG Group – as well as individual councils, Government and others – and we hope agreement can be reached to ensure that locally coordinated action happens with the scale and urgency to meet the challenge of the Climate Change Act.

2. Agreement with the Local Government Group

We share much of the LG Group thinking on the role that councils can play in coordinating an area-wide effort to cut emissions locally. In particular we agree with the LG Group that:

There are considerable economic and social benefits of ambitious local action on climate change. Local carbon reduction has boosted local economies and generated jobs, as well as delivering on a range of such benefits as improved air quality and reduced fuel poverty and congestion.

A ‘single journey’ for councils is needed. Councils need a clear route to cutting carbon including:

- assessing local emissions and opportunities to cut carbon
- working with local stakeholders to develop a climate change strategy
- setting out an action plan with clarity of responsibility and ambition.

Access to high quality data and support is vital. Guidance is needed – drawing on best practice – to help councils understand local emissions, assess the potential for reductions, put together plans for cutting carbon, and monitor their effectiveness. The Government must ensure that comprehensive data (from new and existing sources) are available to local authorities to help build a strong evidence base.

There must be a central role for local authorities in ensuring the success of the Green Deal. Councils should be able to become Green Deal providers.

Access to finance is critical. Local authority and community schemes should be explicitly built into the design of the Green Investment Bank as well as the Green Deal, and Government should help councils access sources of funding, including from Europe.

3. Differences with the Local Government Group offer

However we do have a difference of approach – firstly, on ensuring that all councils act, and secondly on the appropriate scale of ambition.

i) Voluntarism

The main part of the LG Group offer lays out a plan for council carbon reduction based on voluntarism – with incentives to encourage action.

However, it is evident that the voluntary approach has so far failed to galvanise the scale and speed of action needed. One-third of councils opted out of the previous Government’s voluntary system for signing up to area-wide carbon targetsⁱ and of those councils that did sign up only one in five took on meaningful targetsⁱⁱ.

Friends of the Earth is arguing that all councils must do their fair share if the UK is to meet UK Climate Change Act commitments. Our proposal – and that of more than 30 leading councils – is for local carbon budgets for all local authorities, set in line with the Climate Change Act and negotiated to reflect local circumstances.

This need for action on climate change to be a core function of councils is reflected in the Local Government Group offer – see below box. It was also the central recommendation of a Local Government Association commission report in 2007.

‘Our unanimous view at present is that a statutory duty should be imposed on those councils that, within the next two years, do not respond to climate change.’

LGA Climate Change Commission, November 2007

‘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.’

Local Government Group offer to DECC on Climate Change, Oct 2010

ii) **Ambition of emissions cuts**

The LG Group proposes that the ambition of action should be determined locally by each council.

Friends of the Earth thinks that fair targets should be allocated and informed by the need to meet UK Climate Change Act targets, as well reflecting local circumstances.

Friends of the Earth’s work with councils around the country has shown that ambitious action, in line with the Climate Change Act, is both politically popular and practically possible.

Councils already rolling out strategies to cut emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2020 include: Birmingham City Council, Brighton and Hove City Council, Bristol City Council, Camden Council, Durham County Council, Haringey Council, Harrogate Borough Council, Harrow Council, Islington Council, Leeds City Council, Manchester City Council, Milton Keynes Council, Plymouth City Council, Suffolk County Council, and City of York Council.

4. Local carbon budgets

Friends of the Earth is working with councils around the country to call for a nationwide system of local carbon budgets. The system would support all councils to deliver effective area-wide action to cut carbon in line with the ambition demanded

by the Climate Change Act, and involve local people in the low carbon future of their communities.

We are calling for local carbon budgets provision to be included in the Energy Bill (published December 2010). Council leaders calling for local carbon budgets legislation are listed below.

- Cllr Barbara Janke, Leader, Bristol City Council (Liberal Democrat) ■ Cllr Louise Goldsmith, Leader West Sussex County Council (Conservative) ■ Sir Richard Leese, Leader, Manchester City Council (Labour) ■ Cllr David Faulkner, Leader, Newcastle City Council (Liberal Democrat) ■ Cllr Claire Kober, Leader, Haringey Council (Labour) ■ Cllr Paul Tilsley MBE, Deputy leader, Birmingham City Council (Conservative, Liberal Democrat coalition)
- Cllr Mike Heenan, Leader, Stafford Borough Council (Conservative) ■ Cllr Mehboob Khan, Leader, Kirklees Council (Labour) ■ Dorothy Thornhill, Elected Mayor, Watford Borough Council (Liberal Democrat) ■ Sir Steve Bullock, Mayor, Lewisham (Labour) ■ Cllr Sian Reid, Leader, Cambridge City Council (Liberal Democrat) ■ Cllr Jeff Green, Leader, Metropolitan Borough of Wirral (Conservative) ■ Stuart Fraser, Chairman of Policy and 2012 Strategy Officer, City of London Corporation ■ Cllr Ray Russell, Leader, Chesterfield Borough Council (Liberal Democrat) ■ Cllr Jeff Reid, Leader, Northumberland County Council (Liberal Democrat) ■ Cllr Peter Charon, Leader, Bournemouth Borough Council (Conservative)
- Cllr Andrew Waller, Leader, York City Council (Liberal Democrat) ■ Cllr Catherine West, Leader, Islington Borough Council (Labour) ■ Cllr Dave Goddard, Leader, Stockport Council (Liberal Democrat) ■ Cllr Bob Price, Leader, Oxford City Council (Labour) ■ Cllr Paul Scriven, Leader, Sheffield City Council (Liberal Democrat) ■ Cllr Bob Young, Environment lead, Durham County Council (Labour) ■ Cllr Eddie Collicot, Environment lead, Lewes District Council (Liberal Democrat) ■ Cllr Ann John OBE, Leader, London Borough of Brent (Labour) ■ Cllr Veejay Patel, Leader, Leicester City Council (Labour) ■ Stuart Drummond, Mayor of Hartlepool (Independent) ■ Cllr Mark Crane, Leader, Selby District Council (Conservative) ■ Cllr Chris Knowles-Fitton, Leader, Craven District Council (Conservative) ■ Cllr Stephen Houghton CBE, Leader of Barnsley Council (Labour) ■ Cllr Iain Malcolm, Leader, South Tyneside Council (Labour) ■ Cllr Berni Turner, Environment Lead, Liverpool City Council (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Bill Stephenson Houghton CBE, Leader, Harrow Borough Council (Labour)

5. Further information

A briefing on local carbon budgets is available at:

http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/local_carbon_budgets.pdf

For further information, please contact Liz Hutchins, Friends of the Earth Parliamentary Campaigner: 020 7566 1728 | mobile 07957145996

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ⁱ National Indicator 186 (NI 186) – measuring per capita CO2 emissions in the local area.

ⁱⁱ Audit Commission, Lofty Ambitions (2009): http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/nationalstudies/loftyambitions/Pages/Default_copy.aspx