August 2011

Friends of the Earth

Briefing

The new Nottingham Declaration on climate change

This briefing sets out five key areas in which the new Nottingham Declaration must provide clarity and commitment in order to deliver a genuine step change in local authority action on climate change.

1. Ambition
2. A strategic approach
3. Fairness
4. Consistency
5. Transparency

This information and analysis is intended to be constructive in informing considerations as the new Nottingham Declaration is developed.

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Introduction: the new Nottingham Declaration

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and the Local Government Group (LG Group)[i], published in March 2011, commits to setting up a 'New Nottingham Declaration':

> "*a mechanism for councils to demonstrate their commitment to continued action on climate change, and [which] will enable them to sign up to locally appropriate targets and goals".*

Over 300 local authorities have signed the existing Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change. The Declaration commits signatory councils to contributing through local action to the delivery of national carbon reduction targets and developing a climate change action plan to reduce emissions in the local area.

A consultation on the scope of the revised Declaration was issued on 5 August 2011.

Friends of the Earth encourages all local authorities to respond positively to the consultation to help shape the new Declaration. This briefing sets out Friends of the Earth's views on the core principles that we believe the revised Declaration should include.

Five key commitments and principles

To be an effective mechanism for galvanising a step change in council action on climate change, Friends of the Earth believes that the new Nottingham Declaration must contain the following core principles.

1. Ambition

The UK Climate Change Act commits the UK to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. The Committee on Climate Change has repeatedly warned that swifter and deeper carbon cuts are needed: the UK is only on track to meeting the first carbon budget (2008-13) because of the recession[ii].

A high level of ambition for local carbon reduction is vital. The Declaration should commit councils to genuinely ambitious carbon reduction targets for their own operations and local areas.

There is an urgent need for clarity about the scale of suitable ambition from councils to help meet UK Climate Change Act targets. The Committee on Climate Change should advise on this matter; the Committee themselves think it is an area they

'There is a crucial role for local authorities in supporting the uptake of energy efficiency and sustainable transport measures and reducing emissions from waste.'

'This is a potentially interesting and important area… where our analysis would be relevant in suggesting measures to be targeted and appropriate ambition.'

'Based on a quick calculation, we envisage that [this] would require something like full-time input from several members of the Secretariat over three-six months, plus the buy-in of some specialist consultancy expertise at a cost up to £100k.'

Lord Adair Turner
Chair, Committee on Climate Change
April and May 2011

could meaningful provide advice upon, and at relatively modest cost. The Committee sees a 'crucial role' for local authorities in helping to scale up action (see box right).

The Committee's advice would help local authorities, through the new Declaration, to set meaningful local carbon reduction targets.

Whether at national or local level, emissions targets have been shown to be hugely important. They are vital for stakeholders and the public to be able to ascertain the overarching level of commitment of (for example) their council, and useful internally and externally to monitor progress. Aside from the overarching carbon reduction targets in the Climate Change Act, national Government has for example successfully set itself a target to cut emissions by 10 per cent from the central Government estate[iii].

The Scottish Climate Change Act introduced a requirement for all local authorities to contribute to meeting the nation's emissions reductions targets – expecting that local emissions targets would be adopted that echoed those nationally[iv].

There are different approaches to determining appropriate contributions in local authority areas. For example, the Tyndall Centre calculated that a fair target for the City of Manchester is a 41 per cent reduction across the local area by 2020.

Any targets must be:

- Both **locally appropriate** and also **ambitious** - guided by the scale of emissions reductions needed nationally
- **Comparable** – so that people can meaningfully compare a target of their council with those of its neighbour
- **Consistent** - for example, all using the same starting year for emissions cuts, such as reductions on 2005 emissions (the year used by the Government's data on local authority emissions).

Key messages for the consultation

Friends of the Earth believes that **signatories to the revised Declaration should adopt carbon reduction targets which are broadly based on the level of ambition set nationally** (question 7).

Other, locally derived targets, should also be encouraged – for example reducing: emissions from their own estate and operations; emissions from homes, businesses and transport; and fuel poverty.

Targets should be consistent – all signatories should commit to reducing emissions based on a particular 'start' year – for example 2005.

2. A strategic approach

Climate change mitigation and adaptation requires action in virtually all areas of a local authority's activity – from its own operations, to how it implements and even exceeds national Government policy in decisions on planning, energy, transport, waste and beyond, to inspiring action from local stakeholders including business, institutions like schools and hospitals, and local residents.

A comprehensive and strategic approach is needed which details what action will happen, who will do it, when, and with what resources.

As part of signing the new Declaration councils should commit to producing, implementing and maintaining a local climate change strategy.

Leading councils have demonstrated that for such a strategy to be effective, it must be led from the top of the authority and involve the entire organisation. In places such as Manchester, Birmingham and Islington, carbon reduction is – as the Environmental Audit Committee has called for[v] – part of the "warp and weft" of the councils' activity.

Key messages for the consultation

Friends of the Earth believes that **signatories to the revised Declaration should produce a local climate change strategy** (question 5).

The strategy would include the components suggested later in question 5 – for example, cutting own area emissions; working with communities; building a low carbon local economy; attracting low carbon private investment; and acting to deliver the Green Deal.

The strategy should also focus on adapting to the impacts of climate change (questions 4, 9).

3. Fairness

Policies to cut greenhouse gas emissions should also improve the social and economic wellbeing of local communities – including by tackling fuel poverty.

Rising energy bills threaten the wellbeing of all local areas. Policies to insulate homes, develop renewable energy and discourage energy waste will be vital for climate change strategies and for tackling fuel poverty.

Fairness is also a central issue for transport planning. Those on the lowest incomes in society are less likely to own a car. Providing viable alternatives to the car by improving public transport and increasing the attractiveness of walking and cycling can both cut emissions and boost social inclusion.

Key messages for the consultation

The Declaration should explicitly endorse the need for local action on fuel poverty (questions 7, 8).

4. Consistency

Friends of the Earth believes that the new Declaration should be a proud and unambiguous marker of a local authority's commitment to action on climate change.

The targets and strategies set out as a result of the Declaration must also be comparable to those of other local authority areas. The Declaration will lose significance if residents are unsure whether the commitments to which their council has signed are more or less ambitious than those of neighbouring authorities.

Comparability also extends to any targets to which local authorities sign up. It is very difficult for residents to compare, for example, a 40% reduction on 1990 levels by 2020 with a 34% reduction on 2005 levels by 2025. The Declaration process should agree common benchmarks for emissions reductions targets within local areas. The existing data for measuring local area emissions – which previously underpinned National Indicator 186 – adopts a benchmark year of 2005[vi]. This data will continue to be provided by Government and is supported by the Memorandum of Understanding. All 100 of the Local Area Agreement targets were therefore set against this baseline year. The group of 18 leading authorities that have signed up to emissions cuts of at least 40 per cent by 2020[vii] also use 2005 as their 'start' year.

Key messages for the consultation

Signatories should be required to sign up to all of the commitments set out in the Declaration (questions 6, 10) rather than picking and choosing.

Local circumstances will be important in arriving at the precise level of local targets, but the overall level of ambition and benchmarks to which each local authority commits should be the same.

The targets and plans to which signatories commit should be directly comparable – for example, using comparable data sources and a clearly defined benchmark year for emissions reduction (question 10).

5. Transparency

It is important for voter confidence in the Declaration and council action on climate change that councils' commitments are made fully transparent to local people, businesses and other stakeholders.

The Declaration should commit councils to sharing information widely, and actively encouraging rigorous stakeholder engagement and scrutiny. This need not be, and should not be, resource-intensive.

Action on climate change – and accountability for it - cannot happen behind closed doors. All councils should commit to annual reporting on the delivery of their climate change strategies which provides honest, consistent and easily comprehensible summaries of progress – and what new actions might need to be taken to keep the strategies on track.

The process of drawing up the Declaration itself should be transparent, and the results of the consultation should be made public.

Key messages for the consultation

Local authorities should commit to sharing clear and consistent information on progress against their targets and commitments with other local authorities, local communities and beyond (question 11).

The Declaration should commit to annual reports by signatories to their local communities on their progress (question 12, although this question only refers specifically to contribution to an overall progress report).

Further information

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[i] DECC / Local Government Group: Memorandum of Understanding between the LG Group and the Department of Energy and Climate Change (March 2011): http://www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/What%20we%20do/lc_uk/loc_reg_dev/1380-mou-lggroup-decc.pdf

[ii] Committee on Climate Change: '3rd Progress Report: Key Findings' (June 2011): http://hmccc.s3.amazonaws.com/Progress%202011/CCC_Progress%20Report_Key%20Findings_1.pdf

[iii] DECC: http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/news/pn11_059/pn11_059.aspx

[iv] Scottish Government: Public Bodies Duties under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/climatechange/howyoucanhelp/publicbodies/publicsector

[v] Environmental Audit Committee, op cit.

[vi] DECC: http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/statistics/indicators/ni186/ni186.aspx

[vii] Friends of the Earth: http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/council_co2_targets.pdf