

Policy Levers Available Locally

This document is a summary of "[How local authorities can reduce emissions and manage climate risk](#)" published by the Committee on Climate Change in 2012. Whilst 7 years old it is still relevant.

Local authorities are well placed to drive and influence emissions reductions in their wider areas through the services they deliver, their role as social landlords, community leaders and major employers, and their regulatory and strategic functions:

- **Service provider.** Local authorities have statutory duties to provide services across a range of sectors, including waste collection and disposal, housing, environment and transport each of which offers a significant opportunity for emissions reduction.
- **Social housing owner.** Local authorities in England currently own approximately 2 million dwellings (7% of the total national housing stock). While there have already been major improvements in energy efficiency in social housing, there is scope for further low-carbon retrofit (e.g. through solid wall insulation).
- **Community leader.** As trusted leaders and major employers, local authorities have the opportunity to raise awareness about the potential to reduce emissions in their communities, and work in partnership with a variety of organisations to deliver emissions reductions.
- **Planning authority.** Local planning authorities are responsible for producing Local Development Plans and hold the development management and building control functions in their areas. The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in April 2012, calls for local authorities to develop and implement plans that meet the challenges of climate change. Its objectives include the promotion of sustainable transport, planning for new developments in locations and ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, actively supporting energy efficiency in buildings, and helping to increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy.
- **Regeneration coordinator.** Local authorities play a major role in driving local regeneration plans, as recently recognised through the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Regeneration projects can offer opportunities for emission reductions, for example through energy efficient new buildings or sustainable transport infrastructure.

Specific Levers Available

- **Buildings energy efficiency measures.** There is scope for local authorities to lead or to participate in programmes to improve energy efficiency and encourage behaviour change in both the residential and non-residential sectors. Furthermore, through planning and building control functions, local authorities play an important role in enforcing energy efficiency standards in new buildings and building extensions.

- Reducing emissions from new homes:

Development management. Under the planning system, local authorities can **prepare Local Development Plans** which identify **sites** for specific land uses (e.g. new housing) and set out the criteria for approving planning applications. For example, a local authority can set energy **efficiency standards** for new homes that exceed current building regulations where they can show it is viable for the developers to do so.

Building control. To ensure compliance with the standards, local authorities, have a general duty to enforce building regulations. Where standards are not met, local authorities have powers to undertake enforcement action, which can result in prosecution.

- Reducing emissions from existing housing stock:

Promote national energy-efficiency schemes that subsidise the cost of installing insulation and new heating technology.

Lead the development of local offers that bring together installers (the supply) and the households (the market) through a trusted, independent third-party to oversee quality of work, **market the opportunities** to the households and identify innovative finance to deliver whole-house retrofit.

Enforcing energy efficiency standards and performance assessment.

Local authorities have powers of enforcement with regards to energy efficiency standards for extensions to existing homes under the building regulations and can require additional energy efficiency improvements for extensions requiring planning permission. There is also scope for local authorities to require energy efficiency improvement in return for granting planning permission. For example, Uttlesford District Council in Essex has a requirement for homeowners being granted planning permission for home extensions to put in cost-effective energy efficiency measures in the house as a whole.

- Reducing emissions from commercial buildings

There is a potentially important role for local authorities both in raising awareness of opportunities and delivering schemes directly in the same way as for domestic buildings. In addition, local authorities could strengthen financial incentives through introducing differential business rates depending on energy efficiency performance **Rates rel to energy efficiency**

- **Sustainable transport.** There is a crucial role for local authorities to design and implement local sustainable transport plans. Measures such as parking charges or congestion charging can have an impact on consumer behaviour (e.g. resulting in the rationalisation of car journeys and the purchase of low emission vehicles). In addition, local authorities have an important role to play in supporting investment in electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and in ensuring that new residential and office developments are designed to encourage the uptake of sustainable transport options.

- **Promoting sustainable travel through the roll-out of smarter choices.** Evidence from sustainable travel town pilot projects suggests that there is a significant opportunity to reduce emissions and gain wider economic benefits (e.g. through reduced congestion and enabling better physical access to jobs and services) through sustainable travel programmes. This includes a range of measures (“Smarter Choices”) that promote voluntary reductions in levels of car use, achieved either through elimination of unnecessary trips, or through modal shift to public transport, walking or cycling.

- **Public transport support.** Local authorities entering into partnerships with private bus operators to impose quality standards and/or requirements to reduce congestion in exchange for public investment in infrastructure to promote bus travel (e.g. stations, buses, real-time travel information).

- **Local parking standards.** Local authorities can introduce workplace parking levies, which charge employers that provide workplace parking, to encourage modal shift in staff travel patterns.
- **Freight logistics.** Ensuring efficient forms of freight transport and delivery may be important to reduce emissions at the local authority level.
- **Planning and designing new development.** The NPPF recommends that new developments which generate significant movement should be located where the need to travel will be minimised (e.g. avoiding out of town retail developments) and where the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised, to be demonstrated through a travel plan. The Community Infrastructure Levy, which enables local authorities to raise funds from developers undertaking new buildings projects in their area, could also be used to fund sustainable transport infrastructure.
- **Promoting low-carbon vehicles.** Rolling out electric vehicle infrastructure. Work with developers of charging networks by providing land for charge posts. Provide incentives for drivers of low-carbon vehicle – priority parking spaces, reduced parking charges, use of bus lanes, exemption from congestion charging. **?Promoting car clubs**
- **Waste.** Although the landfill tax is determined nationally, local authorities are key to encouraging waste prevention and supporting the diversion of waste from landfill, via policies and strategies for reducing overall levels of waste generated, implementing separate food waste collection systems, and facilitating recycling centres and energy from waste plants.
 - **Waste prevention.** Promote consumer behaviour to reduce waste production. In Devon, this is the Recycle Devon campaign. <https://www.recycledevon.org>
 - **Separate collection of waste for recycling.** Devon's recycling rate is 55%.
 - **Separate collection and treatment of food waste.** This is important in order to unlock the potential for composting or AD.
 - **Waste-to-energy schemes.** These can be based on AD (e.g. converting food waste to biogas), pyrolysis (converting carbon containing wastes to gas and oil) or incineration with energy recovery
- **Planning approval for renewable projects.** Additional onshore wind capacity is required to meet renewable energy targets and carbon budgets, of which a significant proportion is likely to be at a scale requiring local planning approval.
 - **Section 106 Agreements.** Under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990), local planning authorities may enter into legally-binding agreements or planning obligations with a landowner in association with granting of planning permission. For example, the Coldham Wind Farm in Cambridgeshire makes Section 106 payments into a fund managed by Fenland District Council which is distributed towards local projects and regeneration.
 - **Community funds.** Outside of the planning decision making process, developers can also establish community funds, designed as goodwill payments to benefit and compensate communities for the use of their local resources and the disruption and inconvenience associated with renewable energy development work.

- Involvement in low-carbon **decentralised energy** (e.g. combined heat and power plants linked to district heating) and **community ownership**. Devon has a good track record of deploying district heating (Cranbrook, Monkerton etc.) and communities investing in local renewable-energy generation. Local authorities can provide start-up support, loans, land/buildings and a commitment to buy the power.