

Debate Pack

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The role of local government in delivering Net Zero

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1 Background

A general debate on the role of local government in delivering net zero is scheduled for Monday 5 June. The debate, selected by the Backbench Business Committee, will be led by Wera Hobhouse MP.

1.1 2050 net zero target

The [Climate Change Act 2008](#) set a legally binding target on the UK to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 80%, compared to 1990 levels, by 2050. The 80% target was increased to a 100% target in 2019 (the net zero target).¹

The Climate Change Act established legally binding ‘carbon budgets’ which limit the UK’s net greenhouse gas emissions for five-year periods. In April 2021, the Government committed to setting a statutory target for its sixth carbon budget (2033 to 2037) to reduce the UK’s emissions by 78% from 1990 levels by 2035, in line with the recommendations of the Climate Change Committee (CCC).²

The Government subsequently published the [Net Zero Strategy: Build back greener](#) in October 2021, setting out its proposals for decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy and meeting the net zero target by 2050.³

Targets set by the devolved administrations

Wales

The Welsh Government declared a climate emergency in 2019, and in March 2021, the Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru approved a net zero target for 2050. Wales also has interim targets for 2030 (63% reduction) and 2040 (89% reduction), and a series of 5-year carbon budgets.⁴

In October 2021, the Welsh Government published [Net Zero Wales](#), setting out how it would meet its emissions reduction plan for its second carbon budget (2021 to 2025) and meet its target to achieve net zero by 2050.⁵

¹ [Climate Change Act 2008; Climate Change Act 2008 \(2050 Target Amendment\) Order 2019](#)

² Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS, now Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, DESNZ), [UK enshrines new target in law to slash emissions by 78% by 2035](#), April 2021

³ DESNZ and BEIS, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), last updated April 2022

⁴ Welsh Government, [Climate change targets and carbon budgets](#), last updated November 2021

⁵ Welsh Government, [Net Zero Wales](#), last updated December 2022

Scotland

The Scottish Government has set the target to reduce Scotland's emission of greenhouse gases to net zero by 2045 at the latest, under the [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#) as amended by the [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#). The Scottish Government has also set interim targets for reductions of 75% by 2030 and 90% by 2040.⁶

In December 2020, the Scottish Government published its [2018-2032 Climate Change Plan](#), setting out how it intends to meet its net zero by 2045 target.⁷

Northern Ireland

In 2022, the Northern Ireland Executive passed the [Climate Change Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#), setting the target for Northern Ireland to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. It also sets an interim target of reducing at least 48% in GHG emissions against the 1990 baseline by 2030.⁸

1.2

Progress towards net zero

The independent Climate Change Committee (CCC), which was established under the Climate Change Act 2008, is responsible for providing advice to government on tackling climate change and monitoring its progress on net zero. Its latest [Progress Report to Parliament](#) was published in June 2022.

The June 2022 report presents a “new [monitoring framework](#) which details the CCC's updated approach to tracking real-world progress through a host of new indicators”. It gave the following key messages:

The UK Government now has a solid Net Zero strategy in place, but important policy gaps remain.

Tangible progress is lagging the policy ambition. With an emissions path set for the UK and the Net Zero Strategy published, greater emphasis and focus must be placed on delivery.

Successful delivery of changes on the ground requires active management of delivery risks. Not all policies will deliver as planned. Some may be more successful than expected, while others will fall behind.

Action to address the rising cost of living should be aligned with Net Zero. There remains an urgent need for equivalent action to reduce demand for fossil fuels to reduce emissions and limit energy bills.

⁶ Scottish Government, [Reducing greenhouse gas emissions](#), undated [accessed 31 May 2023]

⁷ Scottish Government, [Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero: climate change plan 2018-2032 - update](#), December 2020

⁸ Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), [The Climate Change Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022 - Key elements](#), 2022

Slow progress on wider enablers. The Net Zero Strategy contained warm words on many of the cross-cutting enablers of the transition, but there has been little concrete progress.

The UK must build on a successful COP26. The UK presidency of the UN COP26 climate summit in Glasgow last November successfully strengthened long-term global ambition and introduced new mechanisms to support delivery. It should prioritise making those new mechanisms work in practice and strengthening global 2030 ambition, while preparing for a focus on climate finance and adaptation at COP27 in 2022 and COP28 in 2023.⁹

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ)¹⁰ publishes yearly data on the UK's [greenhouse gas emissions; the latest estimates for 2022](#) were published in March 2023.

In a 2021 report on net zero, the National Audit Office (NAO) highlighted the importance of central and local government working together to achieve the goals of the sixth carbon budget because:

While UK emissions were, or are expected to be, below the caps set by the first three carbon budgets up to 2022 [...] without further action, the UK will exceed its carbon budgets for the periods 2023 to 2027 and 2028 to 2032.¹¹

1.3

Role of local government in delivering net zero

In its December 2020 report, [Achieving net zero](#), the National Audit Office (NAO) highlighted that local authorities would have a critical role to play in the achievement of net zero.¹² Its July 2021 report focused on the role of [local government in achieving net zero in England](#), highlighting that:

Local authorities have an essential part to play in decarbonising local transport, social housing and waste because of their powers and responsibilities in these sectors. More broadly, key stakeholders such as the Climate Change Committee (CCC) see a key role for local authorities in encouraging and enabling wider changes among local residents and businesses to reduce emissions [...].¹³

In its October 2021 report on [Local government and the path to net zero](#), the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (LUHC) Select Committee also said local authorities had a “critical” role to play in achieving net zero:

⁹ Climate Change Committee (CCC), [2022 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 29 June 2022

¹⁰ Previously, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, BEIS

¹¹ National Audit Office (NAO), [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 1.6

¹² NAO, [Achieving net zero](#), December 2020, para 11

¹³ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 9

[...] many of the funds allocated to climate action, such as those aimed at improving the energy efficiency of the existing housing stock and encouraging more sustainable modes of travel, are delivered through local authorities.¹⁴

It also noted the importance of local government to delivering net zero, as “no layer of government is closer to people or better able to tailor climate action to meet the needs of local communities”.¹⁵

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) has said that local authorities have powers or influence over roughly a third of emissions in their local area.¹⁶ However, the Government has argued that 82% of the UK’s emissions are “within the scope of influence of local authorities”.¹⁷ The LUHC Committee highlighted that the Government did not explain why the two figures were different.¹⁸

Policy areas

The Government highlighted, in its [Heat and Buildings Strategy](#), a number of policy areas where local government plays an important role in delivering net zero, including:

- implementing and enforcing national regulations and policy (such as enforcing minimum energy efficiency standards)
- carrying out statutory duties such as planning
- developing and delivering heat network connections
- piloting innovative low-carbon heating and energy efficiency measures.¹⁹

The [Levelling Up, Housing and Communities \(LUHC\) Select Committee](#) also highlighted transport as an area where local government plays an important role in reducing emissions and supporting the transition to net zero.²⁰

Further information on the role local authorities play in delivering net zero in each of these policy areas is set out in sections 2 to 4 of this briefing paper.

¹⁴ LUHC Committee, [Local government and the path to net zero](#), HC 34 2021-22, October 2021, para 2

¹⁵ Climate Change Committee (CCC), [Local authorities and the sixth carbon budget](#) (PDF), December 2020, Executive summary

¹⁶ DESNZ and BEIS, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), last updated April 2022, page 261

¹⁷ DESNZ and BEIS, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), last updated April 2022, page 261

¹⁸ LUHC Committee, [Local government and the path to net zero](#), HC 34 2021-22, October 2021, para 2

¹⁹ DESNZ and BEIS, [Heat and buildings strategy](#), March 2023, para 4.2

²⁰ LUHC Committee, [Local government and the path to net zero](#), HC 34 2021-22, October 2021,

Local government commitments

There are currently no net zero statutory targets for local government in the UK. In the October 2021 Net Zero Strategy, the Government said it did not think that a general statutory requirement for local government was needed:

This is because of the existing level of local commitment with the sector, and because it is difficult to create a uniform requirement that reflects the diversity of barriers and opportunities local places experience.

The [Independent Review on Net Zero \(the ‘Skidmore review’\)](#) recommended that the Government should introduce a “statutory duty for local authorities to take account of the UK’s net zero targets”.²¹ The Government responded that it would not impose statutory targets on local authorities because there was “already a high level of local commitment” to the net zero target.²²

The NAO found in 2021 that, since 2018, over 90% of local authorities in England have formally adopted at least one commitment to reduce carbon emissions in line with the 2050 net zero target.²³ A 2021 study found that 308 (75%) of local authorities in the UK have declared a “climate emergency”.²⁴

1.4

UK Government strategy for local government

In its [October 2021 Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), the Government set out how it intended to decarbonise “all sectors of the UK economy to meet our net zero target by 2050”.²⁵ In the strategy, it said that “devolved and local government play an essential role in meeting national net zero ambitions”:

Not only does local government drive action directly, but it also plays a key role in communicating with, and inspiring action by, local businesses, communities, and civil society.

[...]

Local government decides how best to serve communities and is best placed to integrate activity on the ground so that action on climate change also delivers wider benefits – for fuel poor households, for the local economy, for the environment and biodiversity, as well as the provision of green jobs and skills.

Key commitments to support “decarbonisation in our local areas and communities” set out in the [Net Zero Strategy](#) included:

²¹ DESNZ and BEIS, [Independent report: Review of Net Zero](#), last updated January 2023, page 189

²² DESNZ, [Independent Review of Net Zero: government response](#), March 2023, recommendation 91

²³ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 1.8

²⁴ Gudde et al, [The role of UK local government in delivering on net zero carbon commitments: You've declared a Climate Emergency, so what's the plan?](#) [accessed via Science Direct], Energy Policy, Vol 154, July 2021

²⁵ DESNZ and BEIS, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), last updated April 2022

- Setting clearer expectations for local places, clarifying how the partnership with local government should work, and considering how action at national, regional, local, and community levels fits together to tackle the emission and climate risk challenges we face, and the wider benefits the transition brings.
- Providing resources for local places to deliver stronger contributions to national net zero targets, across dedicated funding streams for net zero and non-ringfenced funding, noting the number of broader priorities on which local government needs to deliver.
- Building capacity and capability at the local level to support ambition and share best practice, while also providing support in areas that may not have made as much progress to date.²⁶

Local Net Zero Forum and Local Net Zero Hubs

In 2022, the Government established the Local Net Zero Forum. It is chaired by the DESNZ, and it brings together central and local government officials to collaborate on delivering net zero at the local level. The Government said the Forum’s aim is “to provide a single and coordinated engagement route into Government on strategic local net zero policy and delivery issues”.²⁷

The Government has also established five Local Net Zero Hubs, each covering a region in England, to support them in reaching net zero. The five Hubs are:

- [Net Zero North West](#)
- [North East & Yorkshire Net Zero Hub](#)
- [Greater South East Net Zero Hub](#)
- [South West Net Zero Hub](#)
- [Midlands Net Zero Hub](#)

In 2023, the Government also launched an assistance website, [Net Zero Go](#), in collaboration with Catapult Energy Systems to support local authorities in developing “successful, locally-focused energy projects”.²⁸

²⁶ DESNZ and BEIS, [UK’s Nationally Determined Contribution](#), last updated September 2022

²⁷ DLUHC, [Local government and the path to net zero: government response to the Select Committee report](#), January 2022

²⁸ Energy Systems Catapult, [Net Zero Go](#), undated [accessed 31 May 2023]

2 Homes and new developments

2.1 Energy efficiency of new homes

Energy efficiency requirements for new homes (and major changes to existing homes) are set out in the [Building Regulations 2010](#) (Part L to Schedule 1).

Under the [Future Homes Standard](#), the Government intends to reduce the carbon emissions of new homes from 2025.²⁹ The proposed changes will require new homes to be built to produce emit 75 to 80% less carbon than those built to the current standards introduced in 2013.³⁰

In 2021, the UK Government took steps to update the [Building Regulations 2010](#) to tighten energy efficiency standards for new builds.³¹ The changes took effect in June 2022 and require new homes emit around a third less carbon:

Under the new regulations, CO2 emissions from new build homes must be around 30% lower than current standards and emissions from other new buildings, including offices and shops, must be reduced by 27%.³²

Building regulations are a devolved matter. The Welsh Government, Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive have also taken steps to update regulations to reduce the carbon emissions of new homes in 2022.³³

Although the Government is responsible for setting minimum standards for the energy efficiency of new homes, local authorities in the UK are responsible for ensuring that new homes in their area comply with these requirements.

The LUHC Committee highlights that local authority enforcement of the Future Homes Standard will from 2025 will be crucial to its delivery:

They [local authorities] also ensure buildings in their area comply with local building regulations, for example through enforcing minimum energy efficiency standards on the private rented sector. Their Building Control teams will be responsible after 2025 for ensuring that homes which have been built comply with the Future Homes Standard.³⁴

²⁹ Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), [The Future Homes Standard](#), last updated January 2021

³⁰ DLUHC, [Future Homes Standard](#) (PDF), January 2021, para 1.9; DLUHC, [Future Buildings Standard](#) (PDF), December 2021, para 1.12

³¹ [Building Regulations etc. \(Amendment\) \(England\) Regulations 2021](#)

³² DLUHC, [New homes to produce nearly a third less carbon](#), December 2021

³³ [The Building Regulations \(Amendment\) \(Wales\) \(No.2\) Regulations 2022](#); [The Building \(Scotland\) Amendment Regulations 2022](#), Department for Finance, [Consultation Proposals for amendment of Technical Booklet Guidance to Part F \(Conservation of fuel and power\)](#), last updated March 2022

³⁴ LUHC Committee, [Local government and the path to net zero](#), HC 34 2021-22, October 2021, para 34

Ability to set higher efficiency standards locally

The [Planning and Energy Act 2008](#) also gives local authorities in England and Wales powers to include policies in their local plan that:

- set energy efficiency standards for new builds in that exceed the requirements of the building regulations; and
- require “a proportion of energy used in development in their area to be energy from renewable sources in the locality of the development”.

These standards are applied to developments through the planning system.³⁵

In its consultation on the Future Homes Standard, the Government sought views on whether to remove local authorities’ ability to set higher energy efficiency standards for their area.³⁶ In its response, it said it decided against the change, stating that, in “the immediate term”, local authorities would “retain powers to set local energy efficiency standards for new homes”.³⁷

2.2

Retrofitting existing homes

The Government supports a number of schemes to improve the energy efficiency of homes by retrofitting them, for example with insulation, or by helping them with the cost of installing renewable energy sources.

These schemes are either administered by local authorities or rely on them retrofitting their own buildings or housing owned by the council. They include:

- the [Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme](#), which provides public-sector bodies, including local authorities, with grants to fund energy efficiency measures and heat decarbonisation.
- the Social Housing Decarbonisation Project which provides funding for the installation of energy performance measures in social homes to improve them to at least EPC Band C.
- the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) schemes which provide funding to improve the energy efficiency or upgrade the heating system of low-income and energy-inefficient households.³⁸

³⁵ [Planning and Energy Act 2008](#)

³⁶ [Section 43 of the Deregulation Act 2015](#)

³⁷ DLUHC, [Future Homes Standard](#) (PDF), January 2021, para 2.40

³⁸ DESNZ and BEIS, [Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme Phase 1: successful local authorities](#), last updated October 2021; DESNZ and BEIS, [Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme, Phase 2: funding allocated to Local Net Zero Hubs](#), last updated April 2022

- the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) schemes, which provide support to low-income and energy-inefficient households that are off the gas grid to help them install low-carbon heating, such as air source heat pumps.

2.3 Planning system

The responsibility for shaping the housing, infrastructure and renewable energy development of an area also rests with local government in the UK.

Local planning authorities (LPAs) – usually district councils – are responsible for drawing up local plans setting out their vision for the future development of an area and approving planning applications for development.

In drawing up their local plans and deciding planning applications, LPAs are guided by the Government’s [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) and accompanying [Planning Practice Guidance](#) (PPG).

Although the NPPF comments on how LPAs can and should support a transition to a “low carbon future”, it does not mention net zero specifically.

The NPPF does state that one of three objectives of the planning system is “an environmental objective”:

[...] to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.³⁹

Chapter 14 of the NPPF also sets out how “the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate”:

It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.⁴⁰

The [government's PPG on climate change](#) provides further information on “how the challenges of climate change can be addressed” in local plans:

- reducing the need to travel and providing for sustainable transport;
- providing opportunities for renewable and low carbon energy technologies;

³⁹ MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#), July 2021, para 8c

⁴⁰ MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#), July 2021, para 152

- providing opportunities for decentralised energy and heating; and
- promoting low carbon design approaches to reduce energy consumption in buildings, such as passive solar design.⁴¹

The [government's PPG on renewable and low carbon energy](#) provides further guidance for LPAs. The NPPF also advises LPAs to give consent to renewable and low-carbon energy projects where their impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.⁴²

Proposed update to the national planning policy

In its October 2021 Net Zero Strategy, the Government committed to reviewing the NPPF to “embed a broad form of carbon assessment in planning policy”.

The Government [consulted on proposed changes to the NPPF](#) in December 2022, building on existing environmental protections to make “tackling climate change are central considerations in planning”.⁴³

The government consultation also sought views on the introduction of National Development Management Policies (NDMPs). It said “net zero policies” were an example of priorities that might become NMDPs, such as carbon reduction in new developments.

The LUHC Committee has said the Government should give net zero “a central role” in the NPPF and should ensure any reforms to the planning system also require LPAs to address carbon emissions and net zero in their local plans.⁴⁴

The [Independent Review of Net Zero \(January 2023\)](#) argued that the planning system was “a major barrier to net zero action”. It called for reforms to the NPPF and the planning system, including the introduction of a net zero test and greater clarity on when local areas can exceed national standards.⁴⁵

Devolved administrations

[Planning Policy Wales](#) (PPW), which sets out the Welsh Government’s land use policy and provides its framework for the preparation of local development plans (LDPs), also emphasises the role of LPAs in Wales in mitigating and adapting to climate change.⁴⁶

⁴¹ DLUHC and MHCLG, Planning Practice Guidance: [Climate change](#), last updated March 2019

⁴² MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#), July 2021, para 154

⁴³ DLUHC, [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy](#), December 2022, chapter 7, paragraph 3

⁴⁴ LUHC Committee, [Local government and the path to net zero](#), HC 34 2021-22, October 2021, para 87

⁴⁵ DESNZ and BEIS, [Independent report: Review of Net Zero](#), last updated January 2023

⁴⁶ Welsh Government, [Planning policy Wales](#), last updated February 2021

PPW also advises LPAs to consider that “development proposals should, after reducing energy demand, optimise the use of energy from renewable and low carbon sources” when assessing planning applications for development.

The Scottish Government’s [National Planning Framework 4 \(NPF4\)](#), which was adopted in February 2023, states that “tackling the climate and nature crises” and “climate mitigation and adaptation” are national policy priorities. It says minimising “emissions from developments” and “zero carbon, nature positive places” are key policy outcomes that LPAs in Scotland should support by:

- including policies in their local development plan to reduce, minimise or avoid greenhouse gas emissions;
- considering the impact of development proposals on greenhouse gas emissions and ensure that they are sited to minimise emissions; and
- supporting proposals to retrofit developments to reduce emissions.⁴⁷

The NPF4 mentions ‘net zero’ in several places, for example, it states that the planning system should deliver “more energy efficient, net zero emissions homes” and facilitate tourism development that is consistent with net zero.

⁴⁷ Scottish Government, [National Planning Framework 4](#), February 2023, part 2

3 Energy

3.1 Renewable energy generation

In the Net Zero Strategy, the Government committed to fully decarbonising the UK's power system by 2035.⁴⁸ It said a “low-cost, net zero consistent electricity system” would predominately rely on wind and solar, which would be supported by technologies such as nuclear and power carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS).⁴⁹

In its 2021 report on [local government and the path to net zero](#), the LUHC Committee highlighted the role of local authorities in supporting the decarbonisation of energy generation:

Local authorities are well placed to support the decarbonisation of energy generation and supply through the delivery of smart local energy systems, owing to their role as planning authority and knowledge of their local areas.⁵⁰

For example, in their role as local planning authorities, local authorities are responsible for supporting the development of small- and medium-scale renewable energy projects, such as solar farms that have a generating capacity of up to 50 megawatt.⁵¹ They are also responsible for granting consent to supporting infrastructure, such as battery storage systems.⁵²

Local authorities can also support the transition to renewable energy by encouraging their local communities to set up community energy projects, such as community-owned solar panels.⁵³

3.2 Decarbonising heat in buildings

The Net Zero Strategy also set ambitions for decarbonising the heating systems of buildings, noting “the vast majority of emissions from buildings result from heating”.⁵⁴ It highlighted that “addressing heat emissions will require a substantial increase in the uptake of low carbon heating up to 2035”. Specifically, it set out the ambition to:

⁴⁸ DESNZ and BEIS, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), last updated April 2022, chapter 3, para 10

⁴⁹ DESNZ and BEIS, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), last updated April 2022, chapter 3, para 11

⁵⁰ LUHC Committee, [Local government and the path to net zero](#), HC 34 2021-22, October 2021, para 111

⁵¹ [Part 3 of the Planning Act 2008](#); DLUHC and MHCLG, Planning Practice Guidance: [Renewable and low carbon energy](#), last updated March 2019

⁵² [The Infrastructure Planning \(Electricity Storage Facilities\) Order 2020](#)

⁵³ DESNZ and BEIS, [Community Energy](#), last updated January 2015

⁵⁴ DESNZ and BEIS, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), last updated April 2022

- phase out of heating appliances that are only capable of burning fossil fuels (such as new oil, coal and liquefied petroleum gas heating);
- switch to low-carbon alternatives, including heat pumps and heat networks, setting the ambition to:
 - install 600,000 heat pumps per year by 2028; and
 - enable heat networks to supply up to 20% of UK heat demand by 2050.⁵⁵

1 Heat networks

Heat networks, also known as district heating networks, carry heat from a central source to customers.⁵⁶ Sometimes described as ‘central heating for cities’, heat flows from an ‘energy centre’ to consumers via a network of underground pipes carrying hot water.⁵⁷

The central heat source can come from many different technologies producing heat and cooling including power stations, energy from waste facilities, heat pumps, and geothermal sources. The heat is supplied to the building through a ‘heat exchanger’, which is a similar size and works in the same way as a gas boiler without the need for any combustion to take place.⁵⁸

A [2022 report by BEIS](#) highlighted that “decarbonising residential heating is a difficult task due to the scale, complexity, and cost of the challenge”.⁵⁹ It pointed to research by the UK Energy Research Centre which found “almost all of the UK’s 29 million homes will require upgrading by 2050, that is about 1 million homes per year”.⁶⁰ In its [2022 report, BEIS](#) set out the Government’s approach to decarbonising heat in homes:

It is expected that heating in homes, in the UK, will be decarbonised by one of three low carbon technologies: (i) heat pumps, (ii) hydrogen and/or (iii) heat networks, alongside the essential work of increasing energy efficiency through insulation upgrades. The suitability of these alternative heating solutions is dependent on factors including regional geography, house type, what heating systems are currently in use, and whether existing homes are connected to the gas grid, as well as other changes needed in the home.⁶¹

⁵⁵ DESNZ and BEIS, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), last updated April 2022

⁵⁶ BEIS, [What is a heat network?](#), October 2021, p3

⁵⁷ As above

⁵⁸ As above

⁵⁹ BEIS, [Decarbonising heat in homes](#), January 2022

⁶⁰ UK Energy Research Centre, [The pathway to net zero heating in the UK](#), October 2020; CCC, [UK housing: Fit for the future?](#), February 2019, p9

⁶¹ BEIS, [Decarbonising heat in homes](#), January 2022

The [Energy Bill 2022-23](#) includes provisions for the creation of a heat network and zone coordinators. The Bill includes powers to designate heat network zones, require buildings to be connected to a heat network and require waste heat to be connected to heat networks.

The detail of the legislation will be set out in regulations, but it is expected that local authorities will have a central role in designating and managing heat networks in their area. For further information, see the Library Briefing on the [Energy Bill \[HL\] 2022-23, parts 7-10: heat networks, smart appliances, load control and energy performance of building](#) (May 2023).

3.3 Local area energy planning (LAEP)

One way for local authorities to support the transition to net zero is [local area energy planning \(LAEP\)](#).⁶² A local authority will work with stakeholders (such as electricity and gas suppliers, local residents, community organisations and industrial or commercial energy users) to develop a LAEP and identify what changes are required for an area to achieve net zero. A LAEP will consider renewable energy generation, heat use in buildings, and transport emissions.

Energy Systems Catapult, a non-profit organisation that seeks to support the transition of the UK's energy system to net zero, and the Local Government Association have argued that a lack of resources and capabilities, a lack of commonly defined methods and standards were barriers for LAEPs.⁶³

In its 2021 Progress Report to Parliament, the Climate Change Committee called on the Government to develop a formalised governance framework for local authorities to support the development of “heat infrastructure and zoning [...] including a role for area-based energy plans”.⁶⁴

In April 2023, the Welsh Government issued a recommendation for all local authorities to prepare LAEPs for their area by 2024.⁶⁵ These plans will then be scaled up to form a National Energy Plan (NEP).

In 2022, the Scottish Government set a requirement for local authorities to produce [Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies \(LHEES\)](#). LHEES are locally-led long-term plans intended to improve the energy efficiency of buildings and decarbonisation of heat in an area. These plans are similar in aim and strategy to LAEPs but focus on homes and buildings. The Scottish Government provides funding to local authorities to produce LLHES.

⁶² Energy Systems Catapult, [Local area energy planning \(LAEP\)](#), undated [accessed 31 May 2023]

⁶³ ESC, [The future of Local Area Energy Planning in the UK](#), 2022; Local Government Association, [Delivering local net zero](#), October 2021

⁶⁴ CCC, [Progress in Reducing Emissions 2021 Report to Parliament](#), 2021, p170

⁶⁵ Welsh Government, [Renewable energy deep dive biannual recommendations update 2: strategy](#), April 2023

Ofgem consultation

In March 2023, Ofgem published a consultation on '[Local energy system governance for a net zero future](#)'. It proposes energy market reforms and the introduction of regional system planners for the energy system:

A regional system planner (RSP) would be responsible for developing a multi-year strategic plan. The RSP would bring together all those involved in planning the energy system at a local level and ensure they understand the goals and plans of each party. They would set out a single source of truth for how the local energy system should develop. This should provide confidence to local representatives of what investment is needed and speed up getting connected to the grid.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Ofgem, [Local energy system governance for a net zero future](#), 6 April 2023

4 Transport

4.1 Overview

Transport is the largest contributor to UK domestic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In 2022 transport accounted for 34.0% of all territorial carbon dioxide emissions, compared to 30.9% in 2020 and 34.0% in 2019 (pre-pandemic).⁶⁷ The large majority of emissions from transport are from road transport. Cars represented the greatest proportion of emissions within the transport sector in 2020, accounting for 52% of transport emissions.⁶⁸

Central government sets a national agenda for public transport policy, makes key fiscal decisions which affecting modal choice (e.g. setting rates of fuel duty) and provide funding for specific modes (especially buses). It is then local government and the private sector which delivers most key transport outcomes. The role played by local government in transport delivery was a key theme of the Lords Built Environment Committee 2022 report into [Public transport in towns and cities](#).⁶⁹

The Department for Transport (DfT)'s 2021 [Transport Decarbonisation Plan](#) committed the Government to produce decarbonisation 'toolkits' for local authorities.⁷⁰ These were published in April 2022. The toolkits do not include new funding, but signpost local authorities towards useful information, give examples of 'good' practice by highlighting case studies, and show the benefits of different policy interventions.

There are toolkits for the following topics:

- Active travel
- Car clubs
- Decarbonising road freight, servicing and deliveries
- Demand responsive transport
- Zero emission car fleets
- Zero emission buses

⁶⁷ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, [2022 UK greenhouse gas emissions: provisional figures - statistical release](#), 30 March 2023, p11

⁶⁸ Department for Transport (DfT), [Energy and environment: data tables, ENV0201](#), 15 December 2022

⁶⁹ Lords Built Environment Committee 2022, [Public transport in towns and cities](#) [PDF], 9 November 2022, HL Paper 89 2022–23

⁷⁰ DfT, [Transport decarbonisation plan](#), 14 July 2021, p12

- Lift sharing
- Transport in rural areas⁷¹

Local authorities have a leading role in the delivery of net zero policy across different transport modes, as set out in this section.

4.2 Active Travel

The Government published the first [Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy](#) (CWIS) in 2017, which was revised in a [second CWIS in 2022](#).⁷² This introduced the concept of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).

LCWIPs are used by local authorities in England to identify and prioritise investment for cycling and walking schemes from local funds and relevant national funding streams. Technical support was provided by the Government to local authorities to help them develop these plans.⁷³

The DfT has published guidance on the preparation of LCWIPs to help local bodies interested in increasing cycling and walking in their local areas.⁷⁴ Adoption of these plans is not mandatory, but the Government has said that it is “keen that as many areas as possible do so”.⁷⁵ In August 2022, 78 upper tier authorities confirmed that they had developed LCWIPs for their areas.⁷⁶

The Government’s 2021 Transport Decarbonisation Plan stated that increasing cycling and walking could result in a saving in CO₂ equivalent emissions of 1 to 6Mt from 2020 to 2025 and produce £20 to 100m in air quality benefits by 2050.⁷⁷ A study by the University of Oxford’s Transport Studies Unit in 2021 found that the shift from cars to cycling only had to be small to have a significant impact on CO₂ emissions. It found that those who already cycle had 84% lower CO₂ emissions from all daily travel than non-cyclists and that switching just one trip a day from car driving to cycling can reduce a person’s carbon footprint by 0.5 tonnes over a year.⁷⁸

⁷¹ DfT Collection, [Transport decarbonisation: local authority toolkit](#), 13 April 2022

⁷² DfT Policy paper, [The second cycling and walking investment strategy](#), 6 July 2022

⁷³ Department for Transport, [Cycling and walking investment strategy](#), 21 April 2017

⁷⁴ Department for Transport, [Local cycling and walking infrastructure plans technical guidance](#), 21 April 2017

⁷⁵ Department for Transport, [Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy Government response to the consultation on the draft strategy](#), 26 March 2017

⁷⁶ PQ 138344 [[Cycling and Walking: Infrastructure](#)], 7 February 2023

⁷⁷ Department for Transport, [Transport Decarbonisation Plan](#), 14 July 2021

⁷⁸ University of Oxford, [Get on your bike: Active Transport makes a significant impact on carbon emissions](#), 2 February 2021

Further information on active travel strategy and funding, including in devolved administrations, can be found in the Library briefing [Active Travel FAQs](#) (March 2023).⁷⁹

4.3 Electric Vehicles and chargepoints

In 2020, the Government set phase-out dates for the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans of 2030, and for all new cars and vans be fully zero emission at the tailpipe from 2035.⁸⁰ The Government expects that, as people transition from petrol and diesel vehicles to electric vehicles, around 300,000 public chargepoints will be needed by 2030, as a minimum.⁸¹

Local authorities have a key role in installing public chargepoints, as they are responsible for all roads except motorways and major a-roads.

2 Strategic Road Network (SRN)

The Strategic Road Network (SRN), comprising all motorways and trunk roads in England, is managed by National Highways. Motorways and trunk roads in Scotland roads are managed by Transport Scotland. Motorways and trunk roads in Wales are managed by the Welsh Government. Local roads in England, Wales and Scotland are managed by the relevant local authority.

Major roads in London (the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN) or 'Red Route') are managed by Transport for London. Other roads in London are managed by London borough councils. All roads in Northern Ireland are managed by the Department for Infrastructure.

The Government said in May 2023 there were 42,000 public chargepoints, as well as hundreds of thousands in homes and workplaces.⁸² The Climate Change Committee said in 2022 that the development of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles is not making fast enough progress.⁸³

There are two key sources of funding available to local authorities in England to help them install chargepoints:

⁷⁹ Commons library briefing SN-01097, [Active Travel FAQs](#)

⁸⁰ DfT, [Government takes historic step towards net-zero with end of sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030](#), 18 Nov 2020

⁸¹ DfT Policy paper, [UK electric vehicle infrastructure strategy](#), 25 March 2022, p2

⁸² PQ 185216 [On [Electric Vehicles: Infrastructure](#)], answered on 23 May 2023

⁸³ The [CCC's 2022 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 29 June 2022, p20

- **The Local EV Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund** supports local authorities in England to plan and deliver chargepoint infrastructure for residents without off-street parking. The fund comprises of:
 - capital funding to support chargepoint delivery
 - capability funding to ensure that local authorities have the staff and capability to plan and deliver chargepoint infrastructure⁸⁴
- **The On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS)** provides grant funding for local authorities towards the cost of installing on-street residential chargepoints for plug-in electric vehicles⁸⁵

The Local Government Association has, in collaboration with the Energy Saving Trust, produced guidance for local authorities in England for developing local electric vehicle and chargepoint strategies.⁸⁶ The Energy Saving Trust has [further materials for local authorities across the UK](#).⁸⁷

Further information can be found in the Library briefing [Electric vehicles and infrastructure](#) (February 2023).⁸⁸

4.4 Electric buses

Buses are one of the least carbon intensive forms of road vehicle transport per passenger, per mile in the UK. Combined with coaches, they represented only 3% of UK transport emissions and 1% of total mileage in 2019.⁸⁹

However, there are still significant reductions in pollutants that can be achieved by replacing petrol/diesel buses with electric alternatives. According to the Government's 2021 national bus strategy, each zero emission bus reduces carbon emissions by about 70% (46 tonnes) annually compared to a diesel bus, and also avoids the 23kg of nitrogen oxides (NOx) emitted by a diesel bus each year.⁹⁰

The Transport Committee [published a report into the national bus strategy](#) in March 2022. This found that by the end of 2021/22, 3% of the British bus fleet was battery-electric (1% in England outside of London; 8% in London). Most

⁸⁴ Office for Zero Emission Vehicles Guidance, [Apply for Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure \(LEVI\) funding](#), 30 March 2023

⁸⁵ Office for Zero Emission Vehicles Guidance, [On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme guidance for local authorities](#), 1 December 2022

⁸⁶ Local Government Association, [Electric vehicles: Next steps](#) [accessed 31 May 2023]

⁸⁷ Energy Saving Trust, [Resources for local authorities on electric vehicle chargepoints](#) [accessed 31 May 2023]

⁸⁸ Commons Library briefing, CBP-7480, [Electric vehicles and infrastructure](#)

⁸⁹ DfT Guidance, [Zero emission buses: local authority toolkit](#), 13 April 2022

⁹⁰ DfT Policy paper, [Bus back better](#), 15 March 2021, p72

buses in Britain (80%) still run on diesel. The figure is higher in England outside of London where 91% of buses run on diesel.⁹¹

Buses are generally owned, procured and operated by private sector operators. The Government has tried to incentivise private bus operators to buy electric buses through reform to the bus service operators grant (BSOG). BSOG has historically been paid as a fossil fuel subsidy, but is now also payable to operators that use zero emission buses (ZEBs).

In April 2022, the Government increased the incentive rate at which BSOG can be claimed by ZEBs to 22p p/km, to accelerate their take up.⁹² The government has also announced that it will undergo a wider reform of BSOG, so that it is based on distance travelled rather than fuel consumed, “which would address the current problem where base BSOG is not paid to electric vehicles (except for a small incentive payment)”.⁹³

Local authorities in England (outside London) have also been able to access central Government funds to replace petrol/diesel buses with electric ones. The most recent funding for this has been through the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme, which ran from 2021 to 2022 and has now closed. Around £300 million was paid to local authorities through this scheme to help them procure ZEBs.⁹⁴

In its national bus strategy, the Government committed to getting 4,000 ZEBs in operation by the end of this Parliament.⁹⁵ However, although many ZEBs have been funded or ordered, far fewer have actually been delivered.⁹⁶

According to the Chair of the Transport Committee Iain Stewart, as of December 2022, only 87 ZEBs were actually on the road.⁹⁷

For more information see the Library briefing [Buses and Taxis FAQs](#) (January 2023).⁹⁸

⁹¹ Transport Committee, [Implementation of the National Bus Strategy](#) [PDF], 30 March 2023, HC 161 2022–23

⁹² DfT Guidance, [Bus Service Operators Grant: guidance for commercial transport operators](#), updated 31 March 2022

⁹³ DfT Policy paper, [Bus back better](#), 15 March 2021, p48

⁹⁴ DfT Transparency data, [Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas \(ZEBRA\) scheme funding amounts](#), 2 March 2023

⁹⁵ DfT Policy paper, [Bus back better](#), 15 March 2021, p13

⁹⁶ PQ 161450 [On [Buses: Exhaust Emissions](#)], answered 13 March 2023

⁹⁷ Iain Stewart MP, The House Magazine, [The National Bus Strategy will fail without greater funding and support](#), 25 May 2023

⁹⁸ Commons Library briefing CBP-8734, [Buses and Taxis FAQs](#)

4.5 Electric taxis

Although taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs) are generally provided by the private sector, local authorities acting as taxi/PHV licensing authorities can choose to set licensing conditions which promote a transition to lower emission vehicles.

For instance, Cambridge City Council has created a taxi licence fee exemption for zero emission vehicles, and licence fee discounts for ultra-low emission vehicles.⁹⁹ In London, since January 2023 all private hire vehicles licensed for the first time are now required to be either zero emission, or zero emission capable (such as hybrid cars).¹⁰⁰

4.6 Modal shift

According to the Lords Built Environment Committee 2022 report into [public transport in towns and cities](#), many local government stakeholders reported that a key weakness in their net zero ambitions was the Government's reluctance to promote modal shift away from private car use. The Local Government Association told the Committee that:

Government ambitions about increasing public transport use make little sense when HM Treasury freezes fuel duty every year and cuts funding to public transport. This is a political rather than policy problem.¹⁰¹

The Martin Higginson Transport Research & Consultancy identified: "A significant barrier is the unwillingness of governments, both central and local, to commit to policies that constrain car use".¹⁰²

The Committee reported a consensus among experts and policymakers that a reduction in trips by private car of the order of 30% is needed to help meet net zero targets. It recommended that the Government should set a target for car reduction.¹⁰³ In its response the Government noted this recommendation and said that it was for local authorities to decide any targets for modal choice that suited their communities:

Locally, authorities have powers to implement measures to support improved choices, which can be tailored to the local needs of communities, as well as

⁹⁹ Local Government Association, [Electric Vehicle Taxi transition](#), 2 November 2021

¹⁰⁰ TfL Press Release, [All private hire vehicles licensed for the first time in 2023 to be zero emission capable](#), 30 December 2022

¹⁰¹ Lords Built Environment Committee 2022, [Public transport in towns and cities](#) [PDF], 9 November 2022, HL Paper 89 2022–23, Para 128

¹⁰² As above

¹⁰³ Lords Built Environment Committee 2022, [Public transport in towns and cities](#) [PDF], 9 November 2022, HL Paper 89 2022–23, Recommendation 17

economic plans. Each locality will have slightly different travel challenges, for example authorities in more urban areas will face challenges quite different to those of more rural areas and it is right that they have the powers to design local solutions for local issues.¹⁰⁴

4.7

Clean Air Zones and (Ultra) Low Emission Zones

Clean air zones (CAZ) and low emission zones (LEZ) are intended to reduce air pollution in cities by restricting certain forms of vehicle traffic. In some cases, certain vehicles are charged to enter a geographical area. While these zones are primarily intended as a public health intervention to reduce air pollutants such as Nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and Particulate matter (PM), they can also reduce carbon emissions from vehicles, and hence contribute to net zero targets.

Clean Air Zones in England

Councils in England can introduce Clean Air Zones under powers granted by [Part III of the Transport Act 2000](#).

According to the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) there are currently seven cities charging under Clean Air Zones in England:

- Bath
- Birmingham
- Bradford
- Bristol
- Portsmouth
- Sheffield
- Tyneside (Newcastle and Gateshead)

Greater Manchester's Clean Air Zone scheme is under review.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Lords Built Environment Committee 2022, [Government response to the Committee's report "Public transport in towns and cities"](#) [PDF], 12 January 2023, P13

¹⁰⁵ DEFRA Guidance [Clean air zones](#) updated 31 March 2022

London ULEZ

The Mayor of London can introduce road user charging in London (such as the congestion charge, low emission zone and ultra low emission zone) under [Section 295 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999](#). The Mayor of London has explicitly stated that the planned expansion of the ultra low emission zone (ULEZ) in London is intended to tackle the “triple challenges of air pollution, the climate emergency and congestion.”¹⁰⁶

Further information on the ULEZ and its expansion to cover all of Greater London, planned to start in August 2023, can be found on the TfL page [ULEZ Expansion 2023](#) and the Commons library debate pack on [Expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone](#) (published December 2022).¹⁰⁷

Low Emission Zones in Scotland

In Scotland, Clean Air Zones are termed ‘Low Emission Zones’ (LEZs). In May 2022, charging LEZs were introduced in:

- Glasgow
- Edinburgh
- Dundee
- Aberdeen¹⁰⁸

The [Transport \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) provides the legal basis to enable the [creation and civil enforcement of Low Emission Zones \(LEZs\)](#) in Scotland.

The Scottish Government have a page explaining how [Scotland’s Low Emission Zones](#) operate and the rationale for them, which notes that they are intended to protect “public health by improving air quality while helping to meet our climate change emission reduction targets.”¹⁰⁹

4.8

Local airports

Some local authorities will act as planning authorities, deciding whether to approve application for either new airports or existing airports that wish to

¹⁰⁶ London Assembly Mayor’s Question Time, [Road User Charging](#), 19 January 2023

¹⁰⁷ Commons library debate pack CDP-2022-0240, [Expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone](#), 19 December 2022

¹⁰⁸ Scottish Government [Low Emission Zones Scotland](#) [Accessed 11 May 2022]; Enforcement of the LEZs will commence in 2024, apart from in Glasgow where it will commence in 2023, see Scottish Government Press Release [Low Emission Zones introduced across Scotland](#) 31 May 2022

¹⁰⁹ Transport Scotland [Scotland’s Low Emission Zones](#) [Accessed 31 May 2023]

expand. These decisions can increase carbon emissions by facilitating more flights and are therefore often controversial in local communities.¹¹⁰

The CCC has said there should be no net expansion of UK airport capacity unless the carbon intensity of aviation can accommodate additional demand.¹¹¹ The Government has consistently disagreed that prevented airport expansion is necessary. In its response to its Jet Zero consultation in 2022, the Government said:

Our analysis indicates that it is possible for the additional carbon emissions resulting from airport expansion schemes to be accommodated within the planned trajectory for achieving net zero by 2050 and therefore, we do not consider restrictions on airport growth to be a necessary measure.¹¹²

For more information see the Library briefings on [Regional airports](#) and [Aviation FAQs](#) (April 2023).

¹¹⁰ The Guardian, [Bristol airport expansion would hinder UK climate goals, court told](#), 8 November 2022

¹¹¹ Committee on Climate Change, [2022 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 29 June 2022, p348

¹¹² DfT Consultation outcome, [Jet Zero: our strategy for net zero aviation](#), 19 July 2022, Para 2.115

5 Barriers to local delivery of net zero

The Government's Net Zero Strategy acknowledged that "there remain significant barriers" to local governments delivering net zero targets:

[...] some places are moving faster than others and that places and communities will face different challenges when meeting net zero commitments and adapting to climate change.

There are significant regional variations in the level of emissions [...] and some of the hardest hit local economies that face multiple development and growth challenges are proportionally home to a greater number of lower skilled workers. Many of these areas are also where high-carbon industries are located.¹¹³

In recent reports, the NAO and the LUHC Select Committee also concluded that, although many local authorities were committed to supporting the delivery of net zero, a number of barriers inhibited local action from being as effective as it could otherwise be. A September 2020 report by the Institute for Government summarised the issues local governments might face:

There is a lot of enthusiasm at the local level for climate action – and many local authorities have translated this into ambitious targets to reach net zero as early as the 2030s. But they mostly do not have the powers, resources or capabilities to ensure they meet these targets.¹¹⁴

5.1 Lack of clarity about responsibilities

In its [October 2021 report on Local government and the path to net zero](#), the LUHC Select Committee noted that a number of government departments were responsible for supporting local governments in delivering net zero:

While the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) oversees local government in England, policy responsibility for many of the areas where local authorities can take climate action lies with other departments. For example, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has overall responsibility for meeting net zero, the Department for Transport (DfT) provides guidance and funding to local authorities in respect of transport services, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is responsible for waste.¹¹⁵

The Select Committee called on the Government to clarify what role different departments play in supporting local authorities in delivering net zero.¹¹⁶ In its

¹¹³ DESNZ and BEIS, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), last updated April 2022, page 261

¹¹⁴ Institute for Government, [Net zero: how government can meet its climate change target](#), September 2020

¹¹⁵ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 3

¹¹⁶ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 31

December 2022 report on [Achieving net zero](#), the NAO also concluded that, partly as a result of “a lack of coordination” among different departments, “the Government’s expectations of local government are unclear”.¹¹⁷

The NAO and the LUHC Select Committee also highlighted the lack of an overarching framework or strategy as impediments to local government action. In its July 2021 report on [Local government and net zero in England](#):

[...] there are serious weaknesses in central government’s approach to working with local authorities on decarbonisation, stemming from a lack of clarity over local authorities’ overall roles, piecemeal funding, and diffuse accountabilities. This hampers local authorities’ ability to plan effectively for the long-term, build skills and capacity, and prioritise effort.¹¹⁸

The NAO called on the Government to clearly set out the responsibilities and priorities of local government in delivering net zero. Otherwise, it risked local action not being “as coordinated, targeted, or widespread as it might need to be”.¹¹⁹ It also said there should be “a clear lead in central government for developing the way departments work with local authorities on net zero”.¹²⁰

The Scottish Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee expressed similar concerns in its January 2023 report on [The role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland](#). It called on the Scottish Government to give local councils “far more certainty than they have at present about the roles” they will have to play in delivering net zero, particularly in the key areas of heat in buildings and transport.¹²¹

The [Independent Review of Net Zero \(the ‘Skidmore review’\)](#), published in January 2023, also argued that, to achieve its net zero target, the central government should clearly define the responsibilities of local government:

[...] there must be more place-based, locally led action on net zero. Our local areas and communities want to act on net zero, but too often government gets in the way. The Government must provide central leadership on net zero, but it must also empower people and places to deliver.¹²²

It recommended that the central government should introduce a “statutory duty for local authorities to take account of the UK’s net zero targets” and develop a “clear framework of local roles and responsibilities”.¹²³

¹¹⁷ NAO, [Achieving net zero](#), December 2020, para 2.22

¹¹⁸ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021

¹¹⁹ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 7

¹²⁰ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 24a

¹²¹ Scottish Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [The role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland](#), January 2023

¹²² DESNZ and BEIS, [Independent report: Review of Net Zero](#), last updated January 2023, para 24

¹²³ DESNZ and BEIS, [Independent report: Review of Net Zero](#), last updated January 2023, page 189

In [its response to the review](#), the Government said it would not impose statutory net zero requirements on local authorities. It said this was not needed “because there is already a high level of local commitment”.¹²⁴

The Government also pointed to existing support schemes for local authorities such as Local Net Zero Hubs. In its [response to the LUHC Committee report](#), it also pointed to the Local Net Zero Forum which, it said, established “clearer delivery roles for local government” and offered “a single engagement route into HM government in a coordinated and coherent way”.¹²⁵

5.2 Fragmented funding and competitive bids

A [2021 analysis by the NAO](#) shows that there were 21 funds supporting local authorities in work relevant to net zero in 2020-21, which provided £1.2 billion in total. The NAO welcomed that the total funding in 2020-21 significantly exceeded the total funding of £74 million provided in 2019-20. However, it expressed concern about the fragmentation of the funding landscape.¹²⁶

It argued that the prevalence of competitive funds, for example for retrofitting schemes, risked “that money does not go to where the need or opportunity is greatest”.¹²⁷ The LUHC Committee also expressed concern that competitive bidding favoured urban authorities with greater capacity that were already active on climate change.¹²⁸

The NAO also noted that the nature of one-off funding bids made it “difficult for local authorities to plan for the long term”.¹²⁹ The LUHC Committee called on the central government to provide longer-duration rather than short-term schemes and to allow local authorities to combine funding pots.¹³⁰

The [Independent Review of Net Zero \(January 2023\)](#) also recommended that the central government should simplify the local net zero funding landscape. It said the Government should combine different funding pots, move away from competitive bidding and provide longer-term funding.¹³¹

In its [response to the review](#), the Government said it was already committed to “simplifying local net zero funding where this provides the best results”.¹³²

¹²⁴ DESNZ, [Independent Review of Net Zero: government response](#), March 2023, recommendation 91

¹²⁵ DLUHC, [Local government and the path to net zero: government response to the Select Committee report](#), January 2022

¹²⁶ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 2.6

¹²⁷ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 17

¹²⁸ LUHC Committee, [Local government and the path to net zero](#), HC 34 2021-22, October 2021, para 61

¹²⁹ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 17

¹³⁰ LUHC Committee, [Local government and the path to net zero](#), HC 34 2021-22, October 2021, para 71

¹³¹ DESNZ and BEIS, [Independent report: Review of Net Zero](#), last updated January 2023, section 4.1.3

¹³² DESNZ, [Independent Review of Net Zero: government response](#), March 2023, recommendation 92

5.3 Inconsistency in reporting

Although there was willingness in local authorities to support the delivery of net zero, the NAO found that “there is little consistency in local authorities’ reporting of plans and progress on net zero”. This made it “difficult to get an overall picture of what local authorities have achieved”, the NAO said.¹³³

The Skidmore review also concluded that a “lack of standard monitoring and reporting presents barriers to progress, including on accountability”. It called on the Government to provide guidance on reporting mechanisms to local authorities so they could better monitor and report their net zero progress.¹³⁴

In its response to the review, the Government said it was “already working on the data, metrics and reporting mechanisms”, highlighting Local Net Zero Hubs as an example of work to build capacity and capability at the local level.¹³⁵ The Government did not provide further information on how it would further consistency in local authority monitoring and reporting of progress.

5.4 Lack of capacity and skills in local government

Concerns have also been raised that, although many local authorities have committed to supporting the delivery of net zero, some lacked the capacity and skills to tackle climate change.¹³⁶ A survey commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2020 found that 79 out of 90 respondents thought a lack of workforce capacity was a barrier to tackling climate change and 70 respondents identified skills and expertise as a barrier.¹³⁷

The NAO has therefore called on the central government to work with local authorities to assess their skills gaps and how these might be addressed.¹³⁸

The Scottish Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee highlighted similar concerns about the [lack of workforce capacity and lack of skills in its January 2023 report](#). The Committee said councils would need to hire additional staff and re-skill their existing staff to deal with the demands of net zero.¹³⁹

¹³³ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021

¹³⁴ DESNZ and BEIS, [Independent report: Review of Net Zero](#), last updated January 2023, page 190

¹³⁵ DESNZ, [Independent Review of Net Zero: government response](#), March 2023, recommendation 96

¹³⁶ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, paras 7 to 23

¹³⁷ Local Government Association (LGA), [Climate Change Survey](#), February 2020

¹³⁸ NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021, para 25

¹³⁹ Scottish Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [The role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland](#), January 2023

5.5 Government response to address barriers

In its [March 2023 Powering up Britain: Net Zero Growth Plan](#), the Government set out how it would work local authorities to deliver net zero by 2050:

- We will strengthen our support to local authorities on capacity and capability building and ongoing knowledge sharing through our Local Net Zero Hubs Programme, Net Zero Go, and the annual net zero conference for local government that we sponsor with The Association for Public Sector Excellence (APSE).
- We will pilot a devolved approach to buildings' retrofit from 2025 in the devolution deals with Greater Manchester Combined Authority and West Midlands Combined Authority.
- We will strengthen the partnership with local government through ongoing engagement in the Local Net Zero Forum.
- We will look at the opportunities offered by blended finance models, and explore simplification of the net zero funding landscape for local authorities where this will deliver better outcomes for net zero.
- We will continue to work with the Community Energy Contact Group on some of the key policy and delivery issues which impact the sector and support community energy projects through UK-wide growth funding schemes and Ofgem's Industry Voluntary Redress Scheme.¹⁴⁰

The Government's [March 2023 Net Zero Growth Plan](#) responds to some of the recommendations made by the Skidmore review and in the [Climate Change Committee's \(CCC\) 2022 annual progress report](#).

¹⁴⁰ DESNZ, [Powering up Britain: Net Zero Growth Plan](#), last updated April 2023, pages 109-110

6

Further reading

Committee and NAO reports

- Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (LUHC) Select Committee, [Local government and the path to net zero](#), October 2021
 - [Local government and the path to net zero: government response to the Select Committee report](#), January 2022
- DESNZ and BEIS, [Independent report: Review of Net Zero](#) ('Skidmore review'), January 2023
 - [Independent Review of Net Zero: government response](#), March 2023
- Environmental Audit Committee, [Mapping the path to net zero](#), last updated March 2023
- Lords Built Environment Committee, [Public transport in towns and cities](#), November 2022
 - [Government response to the Committee's report "Public transport in towns and cities"](#), January 2023
- Scottish Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, [The role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland](#), January 2023
- National Audit Office (NAO), [Achieving net zero](#), December 2020
- NAO, [Local government and net zero in England](#), July 2021

Commons and Lords Library briefings

- Commons Library, [Legislating for net zero](#), December 2019
- Commons Library, [Housing and Net Zero](#), August 2020
- Lords Library, [Mission zero: Independent review of net zero](#), January 2023

Reports by other organisations

- Local Government Association, [A local path to net zero - Councils have a significant role to play in tackling the climate emergency](#), April 2023
- Institute for Government, [Net zero and devolution: The role of England's mayors in the climate transition](#), February 2023

- Local Government Association, [‘Councils are intrinsic to a net zero future’ – LGA statement on net zero review](#), January 2023
- London Councils, [Net Zero Review](#), January 2023
- UK Research and Innovation, [Local government collaborating and innovating to reach net zero](#), August 2022
- National Grid ESO, [Empowering climate action through local authorities](#), December 2021
- UK Energy Research Centre, [The Net Zero Strategy and local government: do commitments meet calls for change?](#), October 2021
- Local Government Association, [Delivering local net zero](#), October 2021
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7

Parliamentary material

[Carbon Emissions: Local Government](#)

Asked by: Offord, Dr Matthew

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if she will take steps to develop a strategic framework to help enable local authorities to deliver net zero within their areas.

Answering member: Graham Stuart | Department: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

The Net Zero Strategy and the Net Zero Growth Plan set out the Government's commitments to enable local areas to deliver net zero.

HC Deb 25 May 2023 | PQ 185563

[Carbon Emissions](#)

Asked by: Offord, Dr Matthew

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment has the Department made of the availability of people with the necessary skills and knowledge to adequately staff Net Zero Hub projects across the UK.

Answering member: Graham Stuart | Department: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

The Local Net Zero Hubs support local authorities, so that local authorities can develop a range of net zero projects and attract commercial investment. Local authorities manage their own workforce. The Government invests £5 million/year in the Local Net Zero Hubs Programme.

HC Deb 25 May 2023 | PQ 185538

[Local Net Zero Forum](#)

Asked by: Offord, Dr Matthew

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what the terms of reference are for the Local Net Zero Forum.

Answering member: Graham Stuart | Department: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

The Local Net Zero Forum has met four times to date at official level, on: 20 June 2022; 6 October 2022; 25 January 2023; and 4 May 2023. The Ministerial Local Net Zero Forum has met once to date, on 9 February 2023.

The Department will discuss publication of the reports considered at the Ministerial Local Net Zero Forum in February 2023 with local government co-chairs.

The Government is discussing with local government what levels of meetings would be useful, including a local authority Chief Executive and Departmental Permanent Secretary level Local Net Zero Forum.

The terms of reference for the Local Net Zero Forum will be published online in due course.

HC Deb 24 May 2023 | PQ 185269

[Local Government: Carbon Emissions](#)

Asked by: Offord, Dr Matthew

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the progress of local authorities in achieving net zero by 2050.

Answering member: Graham Stuart | Department: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

The Government has not collected figures on the number of local authorities that have declared a climate emergency.

The Government has not made an assessment of the adequacy of the progress made towards net zero by local authorities.

HC Deb 24 May 2023 | PQ 185223

[Net Zero Goals: Local Authorities](#)

Asked by: Dr Offord, Matthew

Local authorities have an overwhelming role in achieving net zero, but in the last hour the National Audit Office has told my office that central Government have not developed overall expectations about local authority roles in achieving net zero. There

is little consistency in local authority reporting on net zero, making it difficult to gauge achievements. Neither the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities nor the Treasury has assessed the totality of funding for local authorities to achieve net zero, with the nature of grant funding hindering value for money. So will the Minister carry out an analysis of local authority funding for net zero to inform the next comprehensive spending review, set up an appropriate review to assess the extent to which local authorities in practice have been able to use wider funding for economic growth and levelling up, and work with local authorities to assess the skills gap?

Answering member: Graham Stuart | Department: Energy Security and Net Zero

The Government invest £5 million a year in the local net zero hub programme. We have established the UK Infrastructure Bank, with an initial £12 billion of capital, for the twin goals of tackling climate change and levelling up, and it includes a specific loan facility for local government to deliver net zero. We are looking at other ways of enabling and encouraging local authorities to do more. The details of a devolution deal for retrofit pilots in Manchester and the west midlands will soon be worked out, and I look forward to that being pioneered.

HC Deb 23 May 2023 | Vol 733 c143

Energy: Conservation

Asked by: Esterson, Bill

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to help improve the energy efficiency of (a) schools, (b) NHS buildings, (c) leisure facilities and (d) local authority public buildings.

Answering member: Graham Stuart | Department: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

As set out in the Net Zero Strategy, the Government has committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from public sector buildings by 75% by 2037. To support this, £2.5 billion is being invested through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme over the financial years 2020/21 to 2024/25 to provide grants for public sector bodies in England to fund heat decarbonisation and energy efficiency measures. A further £61 million has been made available through the Low Carbon Skills fund between FY2020/21 and 2023/24 to help public sector bodies develop decarbonisation plans for their buildings.

HC Deb 03 May 2023 | PQ 183050

[Carbon Emissions: Local Government](#)

Asked by: Fletcher, Nick

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many grants were awarded to local authorities for net zero projects in the last twelve months; and what the total value of those grants was.

Answering member: Graham Stuart | Department: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

The Government provides a wide range of funding to support local authorities in reaching net zero. Through their core settlement, grant funding schemes, and UK growth funding, the Government is enabling local authorities to tackle net zero goals.

The Government has established the UK Infrastructure Bank with an initial £12 billion of capital for the twin goals of tackling climate change and levelling-up. This includes a loan facility for local government to deliver net zero.

HC Deb 21 April 2023 | PQ 176756

[Carbon Emissions: Local Government](#)

Asked by: Cooper, Daisy

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether it is his Department's policy that upper tier authorities should include all schools and school buildings in 2030 net zero commitments.

Answering member: Graham Stuart | Department: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

The Government has committed to achieving net zero by 2050. It recognises that local authorities have an essential role to play in local climate action, with significant influence in many of the national priorities across energy, housing, and transport, which are needed to achieve net zero.

Local authorities have a lot of flexibility and discretion in how they take action, including in their engagement with schools. Local authorities have varied local opportunities, needs and circumstances.

HC Deb 04 April 2023 | PQ 174434

[Carbon Emissions: Local Government](#)

Asked by: Offord, Dr Matthew

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what is the total value of awards by central Government for local authorities to deliver net zero projects in the last twelve months.

Answering member: Graham Stuart | Department: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

The Government provides a wide range of funding to support local authorities in reaching net zero. Through their core settlement, grant funding schemes, and UK growth funding, the Government is enabling local authorities to tackle net zero goals.

The Government has established the UK Infrastructure Bank with an initial £12billion of capital for the twin goals of tackling climate change and levelling-up. This includes a loan facility for local government to deliver net zero.

HC Deb 04 April 2023 | PQ 174277

[Energy: Planning](#)

Asked by: Offord, Dr Matthew

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what (a) financial and (b) other support his Department is providing to local authorities to develop local area energy plans.

Answering member: Graham Stuart | Department: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

The Government is considering the role of local-level energy planning in delivering Net Zero. We have supported the development of local area energy planning through the Prospering from the Energy Revolution (PFER) programme, to which we committed £104 million in funding.

The PFER programme included co-funding for the development of local area energy planning guidance, and the production of plans for Peterborough, Pembrokeshire, Stafford, Cannock Chase and Lichfield.

HC Deb 04 April 2023 | PQ 174273

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