

Local Election Briefing:

# Local authorities and the climate crisis



**England edition**

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## Background

Whilst local government action is largely dependent on funding and the way powers are devolved, local authorities can make a real difference in tackling the climate crisis. Research from the Local Government Association estimates that local authorities have powers or influence over roughly a third of all emissions in their area<sup>1</sup>. You can question candidates on their climate plans in five key areas:

### 1. Making climate action plans

Currently, 88% of local councils have published climate action plans, and 85% have set a target year for reaching net-zero emissions<sup>2</sup>. The task is now to scrutinise the quality of these plans and hold councils accountable for implementing them. You can see how your council compares to others and identify what they can improve at <https://councilclimatescorecards.uk/>.

### 2. Transport

Effective, carbon-neutral and safe public transport systems will play a key role in a just and green recovery locally. Councils oversee local transport plans, and can prioritise decarbonisation efforts. They can also play a key role in supporting the transition to electric vehicle use and developing walking and cycling infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/net-zero-our-offer/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.climateemergency.uk/councils/>

### 3. Buildings

Councils play a key role in ensuring new buildings are energy efficient and old buildings can be retrofitted with better insulation and heating systems. This applies both to council-owned buildings and privately owned buildings, as they oversee planning and regulation (although they are constrained by standards set by national government). They can map the local housing stock and understand best what the specific needs of people and place are in their area.

### 4. Energy

All councils can encourage the development of clean energy infrastructure. They can bring relevant local partners together to develop plans for the future of local energy, can influence clean energy infrastructure implementation with planning policy, and offer support for local people and community energy organisations to undertake energy projects.

### 5. Waste

Councils are responsible for the collection and disposal of waste. They can take steps to increase recycling, implement food and garden waste collections, and improve communications about appropriate waste disposal.

## What's the vision?

The climate crisis is the most urgent issue of our times, and justice for people and planet is central to our theology<sup>3</sup>. The energy built around COP26 has somewhat died down, as international agreements disappoint and disaffect concerned communities on the ground.

Engaging on climate issues at a local level, by supporting our councils to make net zero a reality in our neighbourhoods, presents a much more accessible opportunity for churches to seek justice in their communities. As we make changes to our own lifestyles, homes and buildings, churches can lead the way locally in helping authorities to achieve a just transition to net zero.

## Questions for candidates

1. Does this council have a climate action plan? If so, what are the first steps you will be taking to ensure it succeeds?
2. What additional powers and resources do you require from national government to be able to accelerate the transition to net zero in this neighbourhood?
3. How will you ensure that the transition to net zero is a just and fair transition, particularly for those already struggling with the cost of living?
4. How can my church, along with other local civil society groups, support you in achieving this?

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Hope-in-Gods-Future-3rd-Edition.pdf>

## Further reading/resources

- [Hope in God's Future: our theological reflection on environmental matters](#)
- [A detailed summary of what local government can achieve on net zero](#)
- [Council Climate Scorecards: compare councils' climate action plans](#)
- [A checklist for what makes a good climate action plan](#)
- [See all the data on local councils' climate declarations](#)
- [Campaigners' guide to engaging councils on their climate plans](#)
- [Find out what's happening near you](#)

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Information correct at time of writing.