

The importance of People Based Climate Networks in sub-national net zero action

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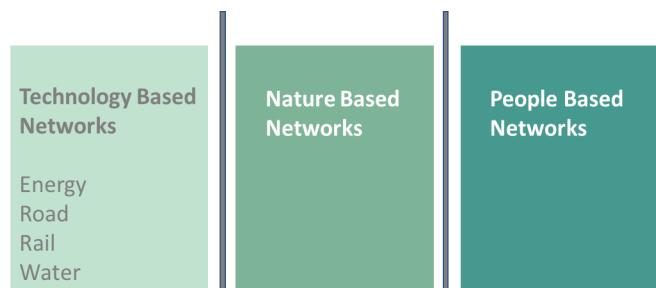
KEY NOTES

- Climate action operates within three, separated national governance networks
- Lack of clarity in operationalising climate change action across multi-levels of governance has led to the rise of new national and regional climate networks
- Government departments have created a structure of regional expert organisations to support sub-national delivery. They work at different geographies of scale and appear to have no clear cross regional linkages.
- In the case study reviewed the county council provides the main focus for climate action and engages with multiple multi-level networks
- Many local networks are forming and they signify the emergence of improvisatory and compensatory local governance by civil society.

CLIMATE GOVERNANCE NETWORKS

Three high level governance networks are operating within the UK climate change sphere: Technology, Nature and People (Figure 1).

Figure 1: UK Climate Change Networks



The **Technology Based Network** is characterised by physical infrastructure, developed over many decades, operating within fragmented ownership and it is highly regulated.

The **Nature Based Network** comprises landowners/agri-business and NGOs operating within en-

vironmental legislation and being led by new government led governance; Nature Recovery Partnerships. The **People Based Network** is highly fragmented with a focus on democratic experiments, protest, community participation and lobbying. It is highly transient in nature.

Network analysis at this high level suggests:

- Technocentric, top down driven climate policy
- A lack of policy integration across the networks and across climate, carbon and nature themes
- A limited focus on behaviour/value change

SUB-NATIONAL CLIMATE NETWORKS

The UK has a well established multi-tier network of governance with local areas being supported by Tier 1 county or city councils, Tier 2 borough and district councils, and the lesser known, parish councils. These existing multiple tiers of government are continuing to evolve, with a growing number of urban combined authorities and county level deals.

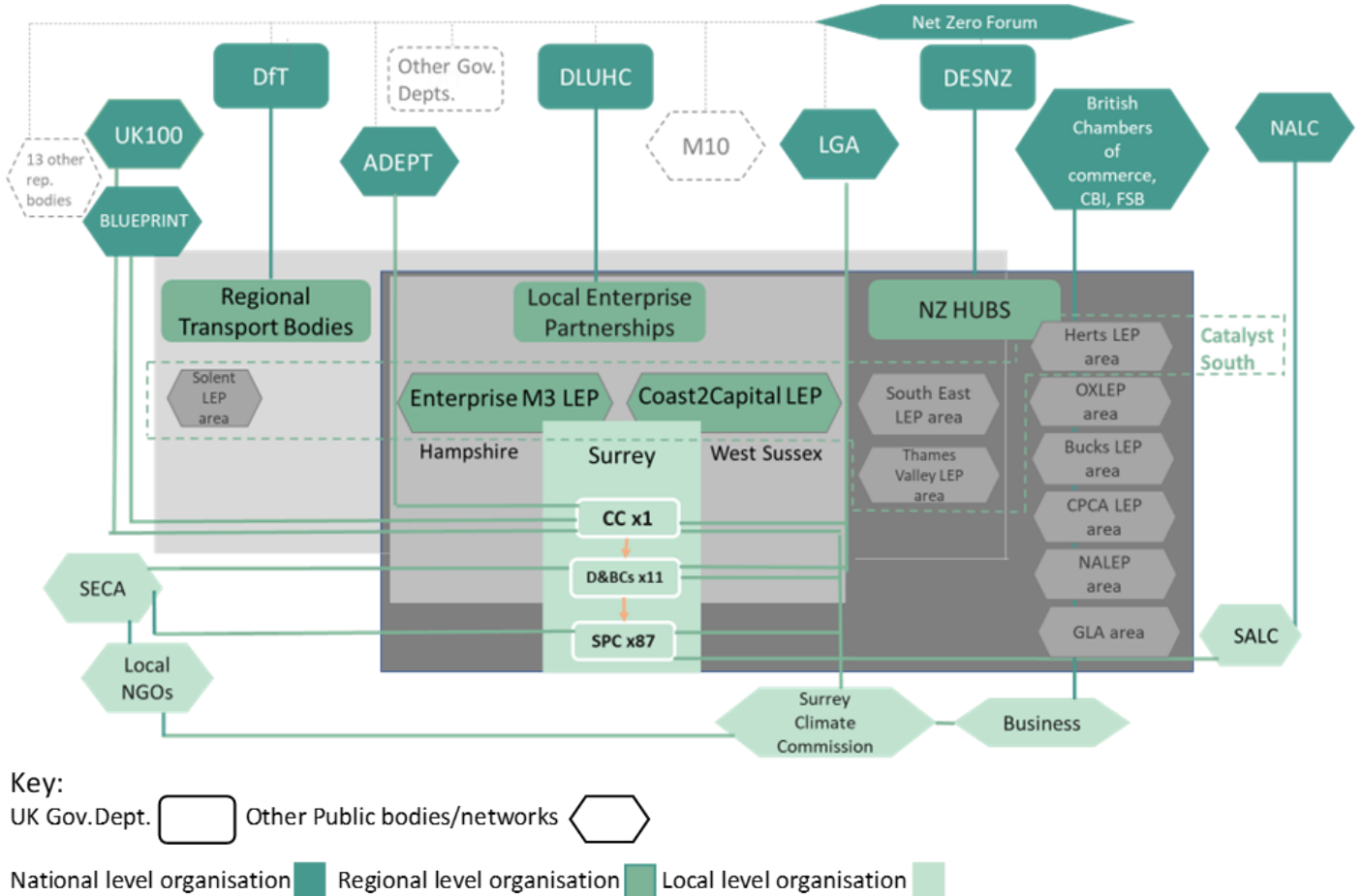
Responsibility for managing climate change issues and demands across these different tiers remains unclear and lacks a clear division of labour or mandate.

As a response to these challenges we have observed the growth of multiple and overlapping networks, developing as a response to this governance void.

1. Departmental funded regional support networks.
2. National representation networks.
3. County led local networks and partnerships.
4. Local parish and community networks.

These are mapped in Figure 2, using the county of Surrey as a case study.

Figure 2: Regional climate network governance structure—case study Surrey



Source: PCAN interviews, (EAC, 2021; Greater South East Net Zero Energy Hub, 2022; Transport for the South East, 2022)

1. Departmental funded regional support networks

Sub-national networks have been developed by several government departments to support action at a regional/local level:

- Net Zero Hubs—expertise on energy for county, Tier 2 and Parish councils
- Regional Transport Bodies—supporting county councils to develop Transport strategies including decarbonisation
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP)—regionally economic development including Clean Growth
- Nature Recovery Network

They are publicly funded organisations, who whilst operating with different remits, generally provide expertise, support, regional connectivity and they primarily operate at county council or city level. Net Zero Hubs and LEPs also manage several grant funding programmes. Each government led network operates at a different spatial scale. Most recently the changes announced to LEP funding and function has led to a large scale multi-regional LEP alliance in the South East, Catalyst South. This underlines the potential transience of key sub-national climate and biodiversity networks .

2. National representation networks

Increasing numbers of national lobbying and networking groups have been created by councils, business groups and climate groups. We would suggest this is driven by a failure to provide adequate subsidiarity and the resulting failure of government to integrate local considerations.

Council groups such as ADEPT and UK100 have focused specifically on climate change issues but net zero is also championed by the Local Government Association, National Association of

Local Councils (NALC) and business groups.

3. County-led local networks and partnerships

Within the Surrey case study the county council provides a locus for partnership working and network development, specifically linked to the development and implementation of Surrey's net zero strategy. This includes a borough, district and county climate officers group and a wider network of a climate commission, NGOs, businesses, academics and residents. The latter is a network in an early stage of development and currently operates in an advisory capacity.

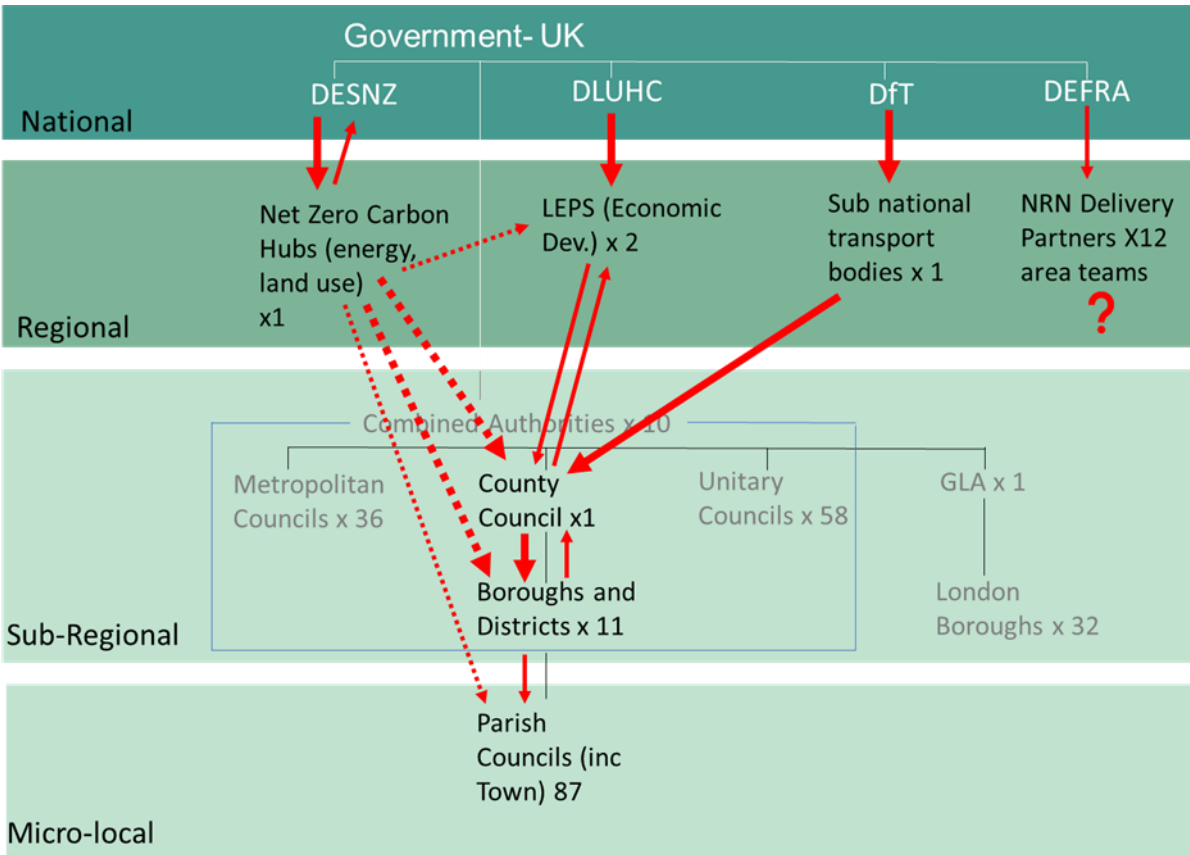
4. Local parish and community networks

Research within the county of Surrey has identified more than 50 organisations engaged in climate and /or biodiversity action. Networks range from low membership, single issues clusters to high profile, nationally affiliated campaigning groups and long established, high membership charities such as the Surrey Wildlife Trust and WWF. At a local level citizen led net zero hubs are developing offering information, education, campaigning work and support with changing behaviour. A Climate Commission has been formed, uniting academic thinking with local business, built environment, transport expertise and community engagement expertise. These local groups offer evidence of the emergence of improvisatory and compensatory local governance by civil society. Additionally several parish councils have created local climate networks to increase peer support and learning.

Within the Surrey case study mapping the information flows and guidance provided, it is clear that the county council is the primary foci of local climate change governance—working

INTERACTION BETWEEN FORMAL MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

Figure 2: Flow of net zero information between multiple levels of governance—case study Surrey



directly with the sub national support bodies, boroughs and districts and with direct links to government departments. Yet there are overlapping areas of activity, such as the Net Zero Hubs who operate across all sub regional government levels, including parish councils and their community energy plans. Here such extended operations test the capacity of regional organisations.

The research also suggests that information tends to be cascaded down the levels of governance with little practical action based learning passed back to support policy and climate programme development. For Parish councils climate information is ad hoc, relying on local borough councillors, but with increasing support from the local Surrey NALC network, SALC.

Beyond the boundaries of the county col-

laboration occurs with co-located LEPS, Including the development of a regional energy strategy and multiple county and tier 2 councils engage in joint programmes such the business low carbon programme; LoCASE. However, whilst the research found representation from councils and LEPS, business groups or specialist bodies, it did not find any cross regional linkages between the sub-national organisations.

This policy note is drawn from wider research available in the PCAN Report: On multi-level climate governance in an urban/rural county: Surrey, available at <https://pcancities.org.uk/>

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