

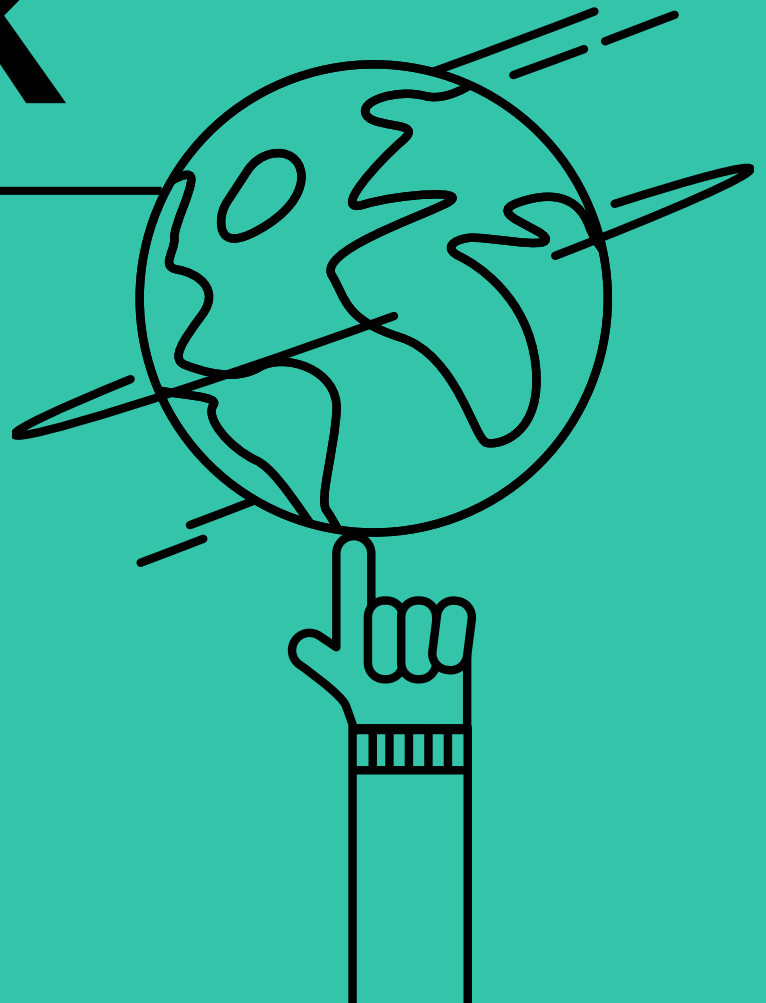


**PLACE-BASED
CLIMATE ACTION
NETWORK**

MARCH 2021

TRENDS IN LOCAL CLIMATE ACTION IN THE UK

POLICY SUMMARY



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**

ABOUT THIS SUMMARY

This is a summary of the key findings of the Trends in Local Climate Action in the UK report produced by the Place-Based Climate Action Network (PCAN) in March 2021.

To read the full report, follow the link here: pcancities.org.uk/reports

ABOUT PCAN

The Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN) is funded by a Climate Change Network Plus award from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). It commenced in January 2019 and brings together the research community and decision-makers in the public, private and third sectors. PCAN consists of five innovative platforms to facilitate two-way, multi-level engagement between researchers and stakeholders: three city-based climate commissions (in Belfast, Edinburgh and Leeds) and two theme-based platforms on adaptation and finance, with a business theme integrated into each climate commission. PCAN is about translating climate policy into action “on the ground” in our communities and supports a wider network of new and evolving climate commissions, including at county level (Surrey, Essex) and now at regional level (Yorkshire and Humber).

PCAN builds on the policy connections, networking capacity and research strengths of its host institutions at the London School of Economics and Political Science, the University of Leeds, Queen’s University Belfast and the University of Edinburgh.

This report takes stock of local climate action in the UK in 2020.

The views in this report are those of the authors and not the ESRC.

AUTHORS

Candice Howarth, John Barry, James Dyson, Sam Fankhauser, Andy Gouldson, Kate Lock, Alice Owen, Nick Robins

Please cite as: Howarth, C., Barry, J., Dyson, J., Fankhauser, S., Gouldson, A., Lock, K., Owen, A., Robins, N. (2021) Trends in Local Climate Action in the UK. A report by the Place-Based Climate Action Network (PCAN). UK.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our thanks to the following people for their input and comments on an earlier draft of this report: Grace Abel, Philippa Borrowman, Lina Brand Correa, Jamie Brogan, Kevin Frea, Kristen Guida, Alice Hague, Kate Hand, Teresa Hill, Matt Lane, Sara Mehryar, Ellie Murtach, Andrew Sudmant, Swenja Surminski, Katarzyna Szwarc, Dan van der Horst, and Bob Ward.

CONTACT

 pcancities.org.uk

 pcan@lse.ac.uk

 @PCANcities

KEY FINDINGS

There is strong, vibrant and broad-based support for more climate action at the local level in the UK. Three out of four local authorities – 319 in total – have declared a climate emergency. Climate emergency declarations have been instigated from across the political spectrum, with the support of civil society.

However, by the end of 2020, only 62% of local authorities had followed up their emergency declarations with a new or updated climate action plan. Barriers that hold back local climate action include a lack of capacity and expertise within local authorities; stretched funding; poor coordination with and disorganised support from national government; and institutional complexities in areas such as local transport and housing. Many of these constraints have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

The overwhelming focus of local climate action has been on reducing greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation). Despite the fact that managing the physical risks of climate change (adaptation) has strong local salience in areas such as flood protection, adaptation features in less than 12% of climate emergency declarations. In contrast, there is a desire among local actors to combine climate action with strategies to tackle social inequalities, promote economic regeneration and ensure a just transition.

We are in a period of extensive experimentation with new institutional models that promote more inclusive, partnership-based approaches to local climate action. There is a growing number of local climate commissions, action networks, climate partnerships and participatory forums like climate assemblies and climate juries. Also emerging are new analytical tools (such as place-based net-zero carbon roadmaps) that help local actors to structure and formulate their plans.

The local private sector participates actively in these new partnerships, particularly in the independent climate commissions and local authority-led forums. Participants represent companies from all sectors and of all sizes, but they have in common their strong links to the local community.

We are starting to see the first pilots to raise local finance through climate-themed financial instruments like climate emergency bonds. However, compared to other countries, the UK has a very concentrated financial sector with few locally-rooted financial institutions.

There are notable knowledge gaps that inhibit the effectiveness of local climate action. There is a paucity of local data on council/district-level emissions and emissions sources, emission reduction potentials and mitigation costs. The knowledge platforms where local actors can share their experience and compare good practice are still in their infancy. And the long-term effectiveness of new institutional models like climate commissions and climate juries has yet to be ascertained in detailed evaluation studies.



RECOMMENDATIONS

LOCAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD:

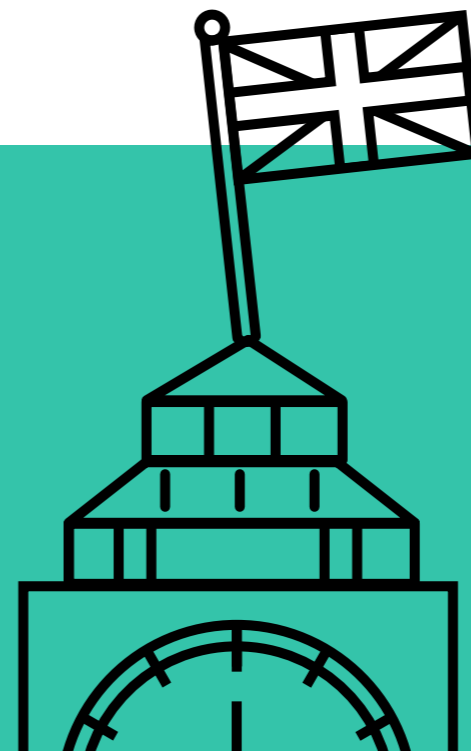
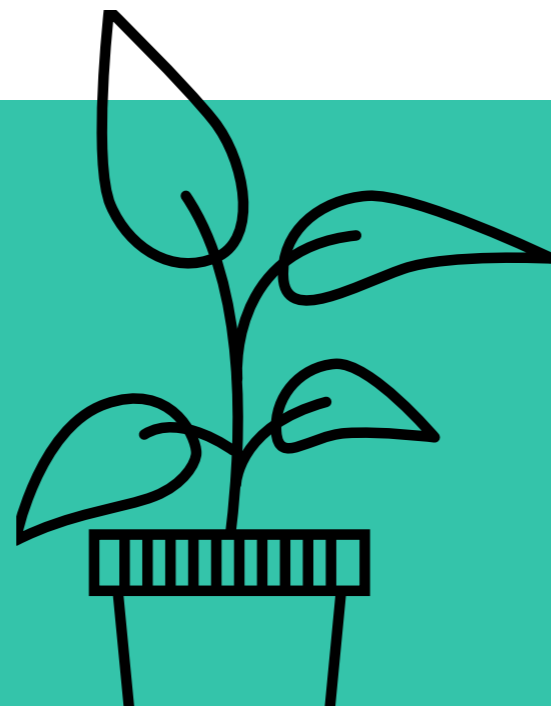
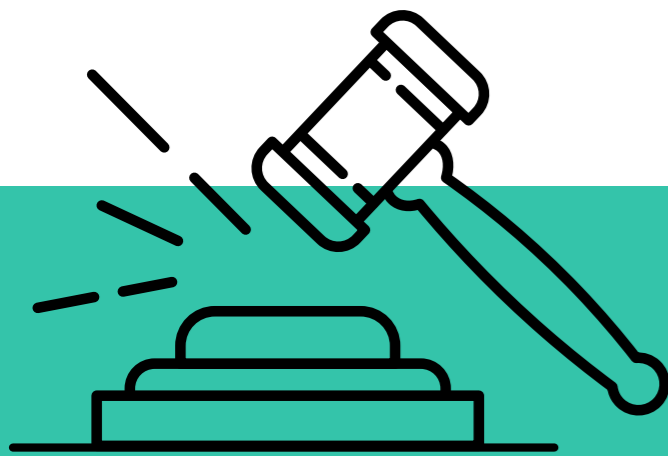
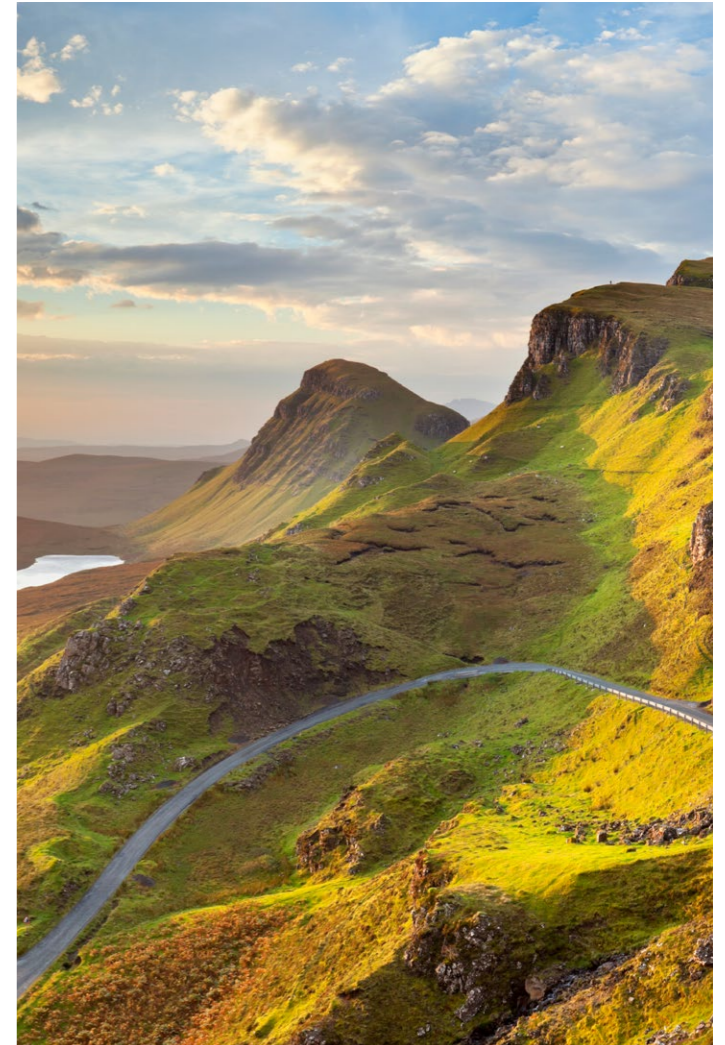
- Follow up their climate emergency declarations with locally supported, evidence-based climate action plans that tackle both mitigation and adaptation. The climate emergency narrative will get devalued, and the window of opportunity will close, unless declarations are turned into tangible actions.
- Adopt a partnership-based approach to local climate action that mobilises the energy and expertise of non-state private and civic actors, as well as the wider public sector. Relationship building and the co-creation of a shared vision and new capacities for delivery are vital components of local climate action.
- Develop climate finance strategies both to mobilise local savings and to attract wider pools of capital to fund the implementation of their climate action plans. It is critical that these climate finance strategies enable transitions to be delivered by and for local communities, rather than being done to them.


LOCAL CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNITIES SHOULD:

- Broaden the scope of climate action beyond emission reduction (mitigation to encompass measures to reduce physical climate risks (adaptation) and tackle social and economic inequalities (just transition). Sustainable recovery strategies from COVID-19 have the potential to be drivers of community resilience, job creation and economic renewal, as well as the zero-carbon transition.
- Formalise the drive for zero-carbon communities through institutional structures like climate commissions. They can be an effective mechanism for local collaboration and a platform to connect public, private and third party actors.
- Collaborate with their local university, national government and local authorities to improve the knowledge base on local climate action. Local action plans need to be informed by the most recent data on local emissions, emission reduction potentials and sustainable growth opportunities. Local actors also need better platforms to share their experience and learn from each other.

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS SHOULD:

- Recognise and leverage the agency and power of local communities in the fight against climate change. Local climate action is a critical channel for the delivery of national policies; it is rooted and responsive to local needs, and it is often more ambitious than national action.
- Put in place a coherent framework to support local climate action, backed by appropriate centrally-driven funds, resources and skills. Climate action requires joined-up interplay between national and local action. Local action without national support will be challenging, national policy without local buy-in will fail.
- Tackle the policy and institutional barriers that hold back local climate action. National policy uncertainty and top-down approaches are often enough to thwart or frustrate place-based climate actions and all of the energy, commitment and resources they can mobilise.



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