



PLACE-BASED CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK

What is a local climate commission?

Climate Commissions are city- or area-wide partnerships bringing together people and organisations from the public, private and civic sectors who work collaboratively to help drive, guide, support and track climate action. Commissions are independent bodies that complement the activities of local government, combined authorities and local enterprise partnerships and that extend their reach and build an area's capacities to deliver climate resilience and low carbon transitions.

How did climate commissions start?

The first climate commission was established in Leeds in 2017 by a team at the University of Leeds working with Leeds City Council. Twenty-four partner organisations were brought in from across the three sectors. Lord Deben, Chair of the UK Committee on Climate Change, helped to launch the Commission at an event attended by more than 300 citizens and the council's leader, Cllr Judith Blake, said, "In Leeds we are fully committed to creating a low carbon, climate resilient city, and the Leeds Climate Commission takes us another step closer to this."

How many climate commissions are there?

Inspired by the Leeds model, new climate commissions have been established as part of the Place-Based Climate Action Network (PCAN), which commenced in January 2019. The ESRC-funded network aims to help the UK meet the requirements of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change and the UK Climate Change Act by building local capacities and stimulating the flow of green finance into cities across the UK. Central to PCAN, new climate commissions were launched in Belfast in January 2020 and Edinburgh in February 2020. PCAN aims to produce a replicable model for other places to establish their own climate commissions, and more are now coming onstream independent from but supported by PCAN. The most recent additions are Doncaster Climate and Biodiversity Commission, Surrey Climate Commission, Croydon Climate Crisis Commission and Lincoln Climate Commission. More commissions are also planned to start in 2020.

How far do climate commissions extend geographically?

Climate commissions are place-based, so the area the commission covers depends on the size, geography and population of the area, and how it makes most sense, within the local

context, to organise. They can be city-based, such as Leeds, Belfast, Edinburgh or Lincoln (i.e. bounded by the definition of a city's limits); district-based such as Kirklees or Croydon (i.e. based on a metropolitan borough) or county-based (i.e. Surrey, which brings together 12 local authorities). They can also be larger (i.e. for city-regions or regions more broadly, as in the North East of England) or smaller for towns or even villages (as in Craven, Otley or Ilkley).

Why are climate commissions needed?

Climate commissions came about in part as a way of providing cross-sectoral support to local authorities that have been hit hard by austerity and lacked the resources to respond with the urgency and on a scale necessary to achieve UK climate targets. However, the need to tell a story about the opportunities for places and the local benefits of climate action – economic, environmental and social – was an equally important factor, and remains so. These were described in a set of infographics and summary carbon accounts for every city, local authority and LEP in the UK (use the drop down menus on [Find Your Place](#) to discover).

Climate Emergency declarations by many places around the UK have increased their salience as a way of bringing communities together to tackle even more challenging carbon neutral targets. Sadly, the momentum catalysed by these has been interrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic and with local authority budgets now staggering from the financial impacts, the need for place-based climate commissions has never been greater.

What are the roles of a climate commission?

At their heart, Climate commissions are independent bodies that bring together the key actors from across an area to drive, guide, support and track local climate action. Breaking this down further, Climate commissions can perform a wide range of more specific roles, including:

1. To connect and mobilise local actors, promote partnership working and the co-production of climate action, and to extend the reach and capacity of local government;
2. To promote inclusive processes that involve and empower local actors, support meaningful representation of different groups and work towards fair/legitimate outcomes;
3. To build a sense of common ownership and shared responsibility, helping to turn an over-whelming challenge into practicable, deliverable activities;
4. To serve as an independent and trusted voice in the area, building climate/carbon literacy, acting as a critical friend and a focal point/clearing house for information;
5. To be a positive voice, emphasising how climate action can be an opportunity to deliver on other social, economic and environmental objectives;
6. To strengthen the evidence base and commission, prepare, support and/or promote the adoption and delivery of local climate action plans;

7. To inform, guide, support and track progress towards appropriate local climate targets and promote transparency;
8. To review current activities, celebrate successes and promote the replication/scaling up of different forms of best practice;
9. To provide neutral spaces for the review of different issues, and publish position papers on contentious issues to support informed, balanced debate;
10. To provide on-going, longer-term support for climate action that spans electoral cycles and variations in public awareness and business support.

What climate commissions do not do

As important as describing the roles a climate commissions can fulfil is stressing what climate commissions do not do. This is vital to underpin their independence, integrity and neutrality. Climate commissions are not:

- A place for marketing or lobbying
- An attempt to take over council responsibilities
- An extension of local authority powers
- A substitute for direct public representation
- A body that directly designs or delivers programmes or projects.
- Policy makers (but they can guide/advise on policy)
- A talking shop – they are there to make a tangible difference in the delivery of climate action!

So where do climate commissions “fit in”?

Climate commissions have been described as experiments in a new form of governance. They are independent and are not part of the formal structure of local government but they work co-operatively with local authorities and have local authority representation on them. They can be a “critical friend” and they can help to light the way. The “experiment” is still young and ongoing, but with local authorities continuing to be hard pressed to deliver on their climate change targets, the need for additional support is clear. With their neutrality, knowledge, networks and collective ‘climate clout’, commissions are essential allies and natural partners for local authorities, as well as providing a platform for broader engagement and democratic deliberation.

How do you start a climate commission?

Climate commissions need support from across the private, public and third sectors, so getting buy in from local organisations, businesses, NGOs, groups, academic institutions and representative bodies (such as chambers of commerce) and, crucially, the local authority, is essential. It is important commissions consider their wider constituency and reflect the diversity and makeup of the place; also that commissions are balanced and representative of gender, ethnicity, area, income level etc. and are not dominated by ‘the usual suspects’. Some commissions, such as Belfast, are bringing in youth representatives, a very welcome step.

Each of the climate commissions in the PCAN network has evolved differently, and has unique challenges and aims as well as common ones, so it's not possible to be prescriptive. Read the report, [Climate Commissions as a stimulus for place-based action: an evidence synthesis from UK case studies](#) and this commentary on ['Building a climate commission'](#) by researcher Alice Creasy. And [reach out to us at PCAN](#) – we will be very happy to help and welcome your commission into the network.

How are climate commissions structured?

Commissions have an independent Chair (or co-Chairs), a Vice Chair (often a local authority member with appropriate portfolio) and may allocate people to lead on responsibilities, eg for communications, council liaison and administration. There is usually an overarching “strategy group” of commissioners that steers the direction of the commission and a number of working groups that focus on different areas. These vary between commissions. Some commissions prefer a task-and-finish approach that is more directed. Leeds has working groups on low carbon, climate resilience and engagement and communications but is now looking to restructure around specific workstreams as a result to intensive workshopping to identify areas of urgent activity. Edinburgh has a group addressing sustainable economic recovery from Covid-19, while Belfast has a “Community Climate Action” group. Check the “About” sections of the commission websites in the appendix to see how individual commissions are structured.

What resources do you need?

The main resource required in setting up a climate commission is people's time. Being part of a climate commission is voluntary - no salaries or gratuities are paid. For this reason, making sure there is enough capacity between those involved is essential. Being linked to an academic institution can be extremely valuable, not only for the expertise this opens up but also for opportunities to get involved with research projects and access funding. In terms of premises for meetings (when these can be held face to face), we encourage commission partners to offer meeting space as an in-kind contribution. Some funding will be necessary – for example, to host events – and this must be taken into consideration.

What support is available?

It is important that commissions are transparent, communicate their activities and engage not just between commission members but more widely across sectors and with the public. A website and social media channels such as Twitter are necessary for this (along with someone with communications experience to manage them). PCAN has developed a website template that can be cloned and adopted by individual climate commissions, which includes a logo and bespoke colour theme for each commission. We are also developing a platform for climate commissions to connect and communicate with each other. The PCAN team can also help develop [roadmaps](#) and plans to work towards net zero emissions (setting out carbon budgets, assessing different options and understanding the economics, such as [this one for Leeds](#)) for places.

What value do climate commissions add?

Leeds, as the longest running climate commission, has the most evidence to demonstrate its contribution to the city (read the annual reports for [2017](#) and [2018](#) and check out the work to support Leeds City Council's [Climate Emergency declaration](#) and associated net-zero target). In Edinburgh, a working group has produced a set of principles to guide a green recovery from Covid-19 and is working on a timely fuller report. In Belfast, where political divisions remain strong, there are hopes that the climate commission can provide fertile ground for people to come together to tackle the climate crisis and the commission has actively engaged with trade unions over the issue of a just transition. Climate commissions bring different things to different places, determined by their needs, challenges and identity. Ultimately, place-based climate action is about bringing local actors together through local climate commissions to encourage, stimulate and support each place on its zero carbon journey, forming a network that connects the local to the global.

Further information

Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN)

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Email: pcan@lse.ac.uk

Twitter: @PCANCities

For information about websites contact the Communications and Policy Officer Kathryn

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To discuss a Mini-Stern Review or carbon roadmap, contact Andy Gouldson:

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Climate commissions

Leeds Climate Commission: <https://leedsclimate.org.uk>

Belfast Climate Commission: <https://belfastclimate.org.uk>

Edinburgh Climate Commission: <https://edinburghclimate.org.uk>

Surrey Climate Commission: <https://surreyclimate.org.uk>

Lincoln Climate Commission: <https://lincolnclimate.org.uk>

Croydon Climate Crisis Commission: <https://croydonclimate.org.uk>

Doncaster Climate and Biodiversity Commission: <https://www.teamdoncaster.org.uk/the-commission>