

**September 2021**



## **Climate Action Plan: climate justice**

A key focus of our Climate Action network is working with councils to adopt ambitious Climate Action Plans. We've written this guide to help you understand more about how climate justice is linked to actions within the Climate Action Plan for councils.

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## Background information

Academics have identified over 10,000 UK neighbourhoods that are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis, such as extreme heat or flooding. Generally, people living in these areas are least responsible for the crisis, and are least equipped to respond (due to factors like income, health, age and mobility).

Climate justice means remedying this by protecting these people as much as possible. It also means no-one is left behind as we transition to a low-carbon future. Everyone should be able to heat their home, enjoy access to nature and have a good quality of life. And those who were previously working in fossil fuel sectors and carbon intensive jobs should have access to training and re-skilling needed to work in a low-carbon economy.

## The goal

Councils should ensure that those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change are properly supported and protected.

## What councils should do

Points 11 and 12 in our [Climate Action Plan for councils](#) suggest councils should:

### **11. Identify the most vulnerable people in the areas most at risk of flooding and high heat levels and target adaptation policies, actions and spending to these people and areas.**

Some climate impacts, like flooding, intense heat, and water shortages, are already inevitable. Researchers at Manchester University have identified 12,705 neighbourhoods in England and Wales where there is a very high, acute or extreme social flood risk to surface flooding and 437 areas where there is a risk of coastal or river flooding. These are neighbourhoods which are both vulnerable to flooding and where there is a high proportion of people less able to prepare or recover from extreme weather events. The council can use this information to help people prepare for extreme events and help them recover afterwards.

Too few local action plans include measures on adaptation. A review of council climate action by the [Place-based Climate Action Network \(PCAN\)](#) found that fewer action plans contained measures for adaptation compared to mitigation, and that adaptation was mentioned in fewer than 12% of climate emergency declarations.

Blackburn with Darwen borough council is an example of a council that has produced a detailed adaptation plan with a strong emphasis on health and wellbeing.

## **12. Ensure that voices of the most vulnerable communities are also represented in council decision making and council-citizen deliberations.**

Councils need to hear the voice of all their citizens in decision-making. Well-educated and middle-class people are adept at getting their voice heard, but the voices of the most vulnerable to climate change are often drowned out.

Ensuring these voices are heard doesn't just mean looking at decision-making processes, but investing in life-long education to support these people in increasing their participation. An example of a council adapting its consultation methods to engage more people is Leeds. The council encouraged those who wouldn't normally participate in consultations to feed into its Climate Action Plan by taking the plan to more than 80 meetings and events across the city. Instead of asking people to fill out its traditional long-form questionnaire, the council encouraged attendees to respond to a shortened 2-minute version while at the event.

## **Embedding justice throughout the plan**

The coronavirus pandemic has only worsened inequalities across the UK, impacting things like health, education and income. In order to ensure a fair transition to a low-carbon society and reduce those inequalities, justice must be a consistent consideration throughout all the actions of the Climate Action Plan.

Some of the actions in our 50-point plan have clear links to reducing inequalities. For example points 13, 14 and 15 are about retrofitting buildings to high energy efficiency standards to reduce fuel poverty as well as cut emissions. This is important because according to government statistics over 3 million people live in fuel poverty. Children living in inadequately heated homes are more than twice as likely to suffer from conditions such as asthma and bronchitis than those living in warm homes. More information on the actions councils should take to make buildings well insulated can be [found in our buildings explainer guide](#).

Point 19 in the action plan is about ensuring that the right training and skills are in place to deliver the necessary energy efficiency upgrades. There's huge potential to create green jobs as part of the transition to net zero and economic recovery from COVID-19. Green jobs can be created in retrofit and construction as well as in conservation including tree planting and woodland creation. This is important because people have been hit hard by the economic crisis as result of the pandemic –for

example 500,000 young people aged 16-24 are unemployed.

A green recovery could also help reskill people who are currently employed in high carbon sectors – they should not be left behind in the move to a low carbon economy. For example in Yorkshire & Humber 360,000 people work in carbon-intensive sectors & will be affected by the low-carbon transition [ref NEF]

Point 48 in the action plan is about making sure everyone has access to nature rich green space. This is important because access to nature is associated with better mental health and wellbeing including reduced levels of depression, anxiety and fatigue and enhanced quality of life for children and adults. BUT access to natural green space is not equal with people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds more than twice as likely as a white person to live within England's most green space–deprived neighbourhoods. Councils should prioritise creating green space where there are currently gaps. More green space and tree planting will also help to reduce over heating in urban areas and reduce the risk of flooding. More information on the actions councils should take on nature and land use can be found in our [explainer guide](#).

Transport is another area where a climate justice approach is needed. For example, a focus on affordable public transport and cycling and walking as well as ensuring that new development is close to essential services will benefit people without cars and deliver health benefits as well as cutting emissions. Simply encouraging a shift to electric cars would cut emissions but doesn't help people who can't afford a car - only a third of households in the bottom 10 per cent by income own a car. Think tank IPPR suggests the current approach to decarbonising transport in the UK could see a 28 per cent increase in car in use by 2050.

Bristol's One City Strategy includes discussions in each delivery theme on engagement, culture and inclusion as well as reducing emissions.

## **Global climate justice**

Action at local level is essential to meet the UK's national emission reduction targets. To help ensure that the UK contributes a fair share of cuts globally local climate action plans will need to achieve deep cuts over the next 10 years.

Emissions related to imports are not included in the UK's reduction targets. But imports of food, timber and other commodities are linked to deforestation in the global south and can be linked to human rights abuses. Councils should consider how they can reduce the overseas impact of their purchasing through their procurement contracts. For example, reducing meat and dairy products in schools and colleges and care homes, sourcing fresh locally grown produce and pasture fed meat and dairy would help reduce the impact of imported meat and animal feeds. This is covered in point 44 of the 50-point plan.

Councils can also help with awareness raising among their residents about the social and environmental impacts of the products they buy.

## Government action

Councils have been warning for some time that they won't be able to deliver action at the scale and pace commensurate to the climate and ecological emergencies without additional powers and resources. Friends of the Earth has joined local government organisations, academics and other NGOs in setting out a Blueprint of what's needed from national government to support councils in key policy areas.

Although many climate adaptation programmes will save councils money in the long run, many have been neglecting these areas due to a lack of funding. The government needs to address this, and Friends of the Earth has called for an extra £1 billion a year of investment in extreme weather protection. This includes money for natural flood defences, such as tree planting in the uplands to hold back flood water, and trees in urban areas to provide cooling.

The government also needs to ensure that regulations on issues such as building standards are adequate given likely future extreme weather. Alarmingly the government's own advisors in the Climate Change Committee (CCC) have found that the gap between the level of risk we face and the level of adaptation underway has widened. Adaptation action has failed to keep pace with the worsening reality of climate risk.

A Parliamentary Select Committee review into the 2018 heatwave stated that "The current lack of regulation to prevent overheating, means that new developments, including hospitals and care homes, which will be around for the next 70 years will add to the number of buildings that overheat." The CCC has warned that there is growing evidence of risk from overheating but that "There is still little preventative action being taken to address health risks from overheating in new or existing homes".

The government also needs to consider the overseas impact of its policies. For example whilst a switch to electric vehicles is necessary as part of decarbonising transport and overreliance on electric vehicles could have negative impacts overseas due to the mining for materials needed for batteries. Investment in public transport, cycling and walking should be the priority.

## Further reading

Climate Just. <https://www.climatejust.org.uk>

The need for more action on adaptation in the UK.

<https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/independent-assessment-of-uk-climate-risk/>

Impact of imports. <https://www.wwf.org.uk/riskybusiness>