

25 OCTOBER 2022

## **PR 9-22 | INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO NET ZERO**

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the nationally recognised organisation representing and campaigning for the interests of the 10,000 parish and town councils and many parish meetings in England. Local councils are the backbone of our democracy and closest to local people, providing our villages, towns, small cities and urban neighbourhoods with a democratic voice and structure, now contributing in excess of £2 billion of community investment to support and improve local communities and deliver neighbourhood level services. There are 100,000 local councillors from all walks of life who are committed to public service. They also provide a pool of talent that provides benefits well beyond their own communities.

NALC would like to draw the attention of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to the following:

- NALC welcomes this independent review of the government's approach to delivering its net zero target.
- However, despite the pro-business, pro-growth approach of BEIS, we think any truly independent review of such a core topic as net zero targets should not simply be assessing how that target will purely benefit business – the current government's key constituency. We would like to emphasise the significant role of the public sector, including local government, in the reduction of carbon, moving forwards. We suggest that the review should also consider how these targets affect the public sector and the services that local councils in particular provide. See also our response to question 3 below.
- We believe that local (parish and town) councils have a huge role to play in decarbonisation. The main roles and contributions which our sector can make in relation to climate change and net-zero include, for example: showing leadership through the use of low-carbon and environmentally sympathetic practices in its day-to-day activities; encouraging local residents and businesses to adopt lower carbon practices, and undertaking new initiatives of community benefit which use low-carbon technology.
- One opportunity which in future could aid moves towards net-zero is local energy generation.
- We do accept that many of the public policy strands to this review, though, are interwoven, and do think it is right that such a consultation factors in jobs, innovation and exports – across the UK.

- We fully support any approach to optimise the nation's energy security (especially in light of the recent closure of the Russian GazProm pipeline), but think that we need to diversify, strengthen and sustain wider, more reliable and safe sources of energy.
- We further agree with the common-sense approach BEIS is taking to trying to minimise costs borne by consumers over the short term, particularly regarding energy bills – but think that more needs to be done.
- Finally NALC considers that the emerging factor of overly high-cost technologies once presented to the public as saviours of the environment – e.g. electric vehicles and ground source heat pumps – needs to be rapidly addressed, to ensure that it is not just the wealthy few who are empowered to fight a changing climate in England.

NALC's responses to the specific consultation questions most relevant to local councils are as below:

## **Overarching questions**

### **1. How does net zero enable us to meet our economic growth target of 2.5% a year?**

Broadly through encouraging cost savings by increasing efficiency across business (including environmental companies), thereby increasing capital and profit, as needed. That said, the government should be requiring environmental companies to plough back profits it makes into further research and development as cited in the introduction, to then reduce the costs of potentially mass-produced goods such as e-cars and ground source heat pumps. These technologies will only have an impact on climate change if they are cheap enough to both buy and produce. NALC also thinks that the challenge of how to cut down on the minerals and metals used in manufacturing the batteries for EVs due to their scarcity and harsh environmental and social costs also needs to be recognised.

### **2. What challenges and obstacles have you identified to decarbonisation?**

Local councils could have more of an impact on decarbonisation in their areas if they were actively engaged by principal local authorities when framing local nature partnership strategies. If local councils were given further powers under the emerging neighbourhood governance review originally cited in the February 2022 Levelling Up The United Kingdom White Paper – to both plant more trees and care for existing ones (within and beyond their own boundaries) – that would greatly assist them in fighting carbonisation in their places.

### **3. What opportunities are there for new/amended measures to stimulate or facilitate the transition to net zero in a way that is pro-growth and/or pro-business?**

The government should continue to offer central subsidies to all business that are prepared to demonstrably and consistently meet decarbonisation targets. Such incentives should be proportionate but could offset production costs for certain firms during the current cost of production crisis – sufficient to enable minimum growth and re-investment. However the public sector should not be ignored just because it is not the constituency of the current government – and local councils should be empowered to meaningfully apply to all climate and carbon related central funding sources to improve the environment in their areas, something which is clearly not the case currently.

### **4. What more could government do to support businesses, consumers and other actors to decarbonise?**

Local councils fall under the category of “other actors”, but as customers of suppliers might also be regarded as consumers – see 3. The government’s response obviously has to be public and private in reach. Firms should be given carbon offsetting tax incentives if they hit their carbon reduction targets. Local councils should be eligible to apply as mentioned for specific decarbonisation and environmental funding pots currently only open to principal authorities – and this would likely – for local councils in England – allow a significant quantum of difference to be made on reducing carbon from services they deliver.

### **5. Where and in what areas of policy focus could net zero be achieved in a more economically efficient manner?**

There needs to be greater collaboration between energy companies and local government. Commercial level data, e.g., through gas and electricity companies/networks who own granular data could be used to build up a clearer picture of principal authority area-level emissions, and some organisations who support local authorities, such as REGEN, are already working to explore how best to do this. At the parish spatial level – if this is available – this should also be factored in. However, it is important to understand how this data is produced and to understand the context of this data. Relevant cascading and sharing of such data could identify further efficiencies.

### **6. How should we balance our priorities to maintaining energy security with our commitments to delivering net zero by 2050?**

These should both be retained as a 50/50 priority. One target should never supersede the other. Further delays to achieving net zero will render government policy redundant and become further ignored. However, the closure of the

GazProm pipeline and the concomitant rise in energy prices is a far more grave medium term threat which must be resolved and cannot take second place to longer term, if noble, green targets.

### **7. What export opportunities does the transition to net zero present for the UK economy or UK businesses?**

This depends entirely on the ability of UK businesses to innovate, decarbonise cheaply, hit their net zero targets and keep their product costs down to a minimum for consumers. Some local councils are looking at not organising Christmas light events in 2022 for the first time ever for instance because energy and lighting costs have exploded. There is no point in the government being ambitious for export business if consumers in its own country cannot even afford to buy the products of British firms.

### **Questions for local government, communities and other organisations delivering net zero locally**

#### **24. What are the biggest barriers you face in decarbonising / enabling your communities and areas to decarbonise?**

See answers to questions 2 and 4 above. Local councils could have more of an impact on decarbonisation in their areas if they were actively engaged by principal local authorities when framing local nature partnership strategies. If local councils were given further powers under the emerging neighbourhood governance review originally cited in the February 2022 Levelling Up The United Kingdom White Paper - to both plant more trees and care for existing ones (within and beyond their own boundaries) - that would greatly assist them in fighting carbonisation in their places.

Local councils should be eligible to apply as mentioned for specific decarbonisation and environmental funding pots currently only open to principal authorities - and this would likely allow a significant quantum of difference to be made on reducing carbon from services local councils in England, deliver.

#### **25. What has worked well? Please share examples of any successful place-based net zero projects.**

There are many instances of these which can be viewed in the NALC Climate change case studies publication [here](#).

NALC wants to highlight the excellent work of the Essex County Council Independent Climate Action Commission set up 2 years ago to achieve Carbon Neutrality progressively from 2030. To help tackle climate change, and help

everyone across Essex reduce their carbon footprint, Essex County Council and the Essex Climate Action Commission have put together three Climate Action Advice packs: for businesses, schools and residents.

They were developed in response to the recommendations set out in the Essex Climate Action Commission's report 'Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral' which was launched at the same time the Council announced its Climate Action Challenge Fund. The £500,000 Essex County Council Climate Action Challenge Fund which is available until March 2023, offers grants of up to £20,000 to support voluntary and community activities tackling key climate issues in the county.

The advice packs offer a variety of cost-effective tips, useful advice and achievable recommendations which aim to help reduce your carbon footprint, lessen our impact on the planet and include money-saving tips to help tackle the cost-of-living crisis. For example, when it comes to transport, residents can swap their cars for walking or cycling. This will not only help reduce their carbon footprint, but it can also be beneficial for mental and physical health, while also saving money on petrol. To help tackle the cost-of-living crisis, the residents' pack includes a lot of useful advice, such as insulating homes, which can help save a significant amount of money on energy bills.

## **26. How does the planning system affect your efforts to decarbonise?**

Currently the planning system does not support the ability of local councils' efforts to decarbonise. NALC has long argued for the government to bring planning guidance and building regulations in line with government objectives by making it conditional for energy saving and carbon neutral measures are conditional for the approval all planning applications, especially new housing developments. This has yet to happen.

We have long argued that new build houses and business should be provided with in-built infrastructure to ensure effective insulation and the installation of technology such as solar panels and heat source pumps.

And NALC has long argued that Local Plans and large developments to be subject to environmental appraisals and it supports energy efficient homes and more trees.

## **27. How can the design of net zero policies, programmes, and funding schemes be improved to make it easier to deliver in your area?**

Simply – if local councils were given the same rights to apply for green – central government / agency funding sources as principal authorities this would enable them to make a huge difference to decarbonise in their place.

**28. Are there any other implications of net zero or specific decarbonisation projects for your area that the Review should consider?**

Again – the government needs to refer to the 2021 NALC publication What can local councils do on climate change? [here](#) for local examples.

Should you require any further information on this response please do not hesitate to contact Chris Borg, policy manager, on 07714 771049 or via email at [chris.borg@nalc.gov.uk](mailto:chris.borg@nalc.gov.uk) . © NALC 2022