



## Climate Emergency: Council Declarations

*To all APSE main contacts, chief executives and council leaders across the UK*

### Key issues

- Climate Emergency declarations have been passed by more than 70 local authorities, with more declaring all the time. A major motivator for declaring a Climate Emergency is to galvanise support for the climate change agenda and set a clear target by which the council and/or locality will be carbon neutral.
- A Climate Emergency declaration and a carbon neutrality target date needs to be accompanied by a clear action plan that is supported by and embedded in the local authority as a whole.
- There is a clear role and opportunity for local authorities to explore their assets and assess how they can best be used for renewable energy developments, in order to transition to a carbon neutral council and/or locality. In doing so, there are also huge economic and social opportunities to be capitalised on.

### 1. Introduction

A Climate Emergency declaration issued by a council can be a powerful catalyst for action if paired with a clear action plan. Since the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report in October 2018 the Climate Emergency movement has emerged; originating in Australia and shifting to the UK in November 2018 when Bristol City Council became the first UK local authority to declare a Climate Emergency. Since then a whole host of councils have declared Climate Emergencies and set targets to become carbon neutral. The most commonly set date is 2030, with others setting targets for dates such as 2028, 2038 and 2050. The majority of local authority carbon neutral targets that have been inspired by the **Climate Emergency movement are much more radical than the UK government's national target of an 80% reduction in emissions by 2050.**

Even if a local authority does not wish to declare a Climate Emergency with this level of commitment, there is still an imperative for councils to be mindful of the relevant statutory duties placed on local authorities and the international commitments made by Government. With this in mind local authorities would still want to be planning for climate change mitigation and adaption and drawing up a suitable strategy and actions to do so.

This briefing therefore provides the background, purpose, examples, benefits and challenges of declaring a Climate Emergency, as well as information on the practical implications of responding positively in mitigating and adapting to climate change. The briefing concludes with information about how [APSE Energy](#) can help councils to achieve their carbon neutrality targets.

## 2. Background

The Climate Emergency movement has taken hold on the back of the October 2018 IPCC special report on the state of global warming, which warned of the rapid and far reaching consequences of over 1.5 °C of warming.

This report outlines that limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society. With clear benefits to people and natural ecosystems, limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C could go hand in hand with ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society. In October 2018 APSE Energy wrote a briefing on the IPCC report, which can be accessed [here](#).

In November, the councils of two major cities, Bristol and Manchester, passed motions declaring a Climate Emergency and set targets aiming to be carbon neutral by 2030 and 2038 respectively. Since then, there has been a wave of Climate Emergency declarations by councils across the UK.

## 3. Purpose

A major motivator for declaring a Climate Emergency is to galvanise support for the climate change agenda and set a clear target by which the council and/or locality will be carbon neutral. It is widely recognised that carbon neutrality is a necessary target if we are to do all we can to keep global warming below 1.5 °C.

The website '[Declare a Climate Emergency](#)', discusses that the premise behind declaring a Climate Emergency comes from the idea that emergency situations are declared when there is a life-threatening situation. In emergency situations dealing with the problem becomes a top priority, people temporarily set aside business-as-usual and focus intently on determining the safest course of action and doing whatever is required to deal effectively with a threat.

Consequently people who were previously complacent about the climate crisis may respond with fear if their local council declares a Climate Emergency; and that fear can be channelled into action if their local council also gives clear information about the most effective ways everyone can take action and the realistic outcomes to expect from those

actions. A process of behaviour change to encourage action on the part of individuals, communities, businesses and government administrations.

A council can achieve a lot by declaring a Climate Emergency and lobbying their national government for the big changes only they can make. It will empower communities, encourage other councils to follow suit and generally help all of us treat the climate crisis as the emergency that it is.

The recent protests from the campaign group, Extinction Rebellion, call upon national government to declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency and work with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change. These types of actions suggest that it is now becoming a priority for local and national government to work together, along with communities, to tackle climate change.

#### 4. Examples

Nottingham City Council has set the most ambitious carbon neutrality target by **committing to become the first 'net-zero carbon' city in the UK by 2028**. The council has already met its energy strategy targets two years early by reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 26% and is on track to meet its target of 20% of energy generation being from low carbon sources by 2020. This progress has been driven by a combination of the **council's programme of renewable energy projects and a reduction in the city's energy demand**, alongside substantial political backing.

Bristol City Council was the first UK council to declare a Climate Emergency. The motion was unanimously backed by councillors and has led to a commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030 in an effort to avoid catastrophic climate breakdown. The motion was put forward **by councillor Carla Denyer who said, the UN report made it clear that "time to preserve Earth as we know it is running out"**. Denyer also said that the Bristol declaration could see a focus on renewable electricity, carbon neutral buildings, congestion charges and investment in clean transport infrastructure.

Durham County Council have taken a slightly different approach and have passed a motion declaring a Climate Emergency committing the council to a 60% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, and to explore becoming carbon neutral by 2050. Crucially, included in the motion is to investigate what further actions are necessary to make the whole locality of County Durham carbon neutral by 2050 and a pledge to achieve this. As a large county, a carbon neutral locality would have a big impact on UK emissions. At a full council meeting in February 2019 the carbon neutral target date was debated. During the debate, councillors raised concerns about the difficult task of committing to a 2030 target, while others argued that other councils had adopted the motion with a 2030 target.

Manchester City Council was one of the first authorities to declare a Climate Emergency and backed a plan developed by the council's Climate Change Board with input from the University of Manchester's Tyndall Centre. The plan, named [Playing Our Full Part](#), introduces a science-based 'carbon budget' for the city that caps total emissions at 15 million tonnes from 2018-2100. To meet the target the city will be required to cut emissions 13% year-on-year, making it a net zero carbon city by 2038. A zero carbon Manchester is expected to have many benefits for its citizens; such as, enhanced air quality, better public transport networks, lower energy bills and future job opportunities in the growing low-carbon energy sector.

At the time of writing this briefing, 78 UK councils have declared Climate Emergencies, according to the [Climate Emergency Declaration website](#). These localities cover a population of 23,221,208 people.

## 5. Benefits and Challenges

Becoming carbon neutral is a difficult task, carbon is currently embedded into all aspects of modern life. Councils will in some way need to adapt and change corporately on a strategic and operational level if a carbon neutrality target is to be realised. Therefore, a Climate Emergency declaration and a carbon neutrality target needs to be accompanied by a clear action plan that is supported by and embedded in the local authority as a whole.

It is highly likely that Climate Emergency declarations by local authorities will lead to more renewable energy projects, which could also provide opportunities for revenue generation. The reason for this is that energy is the preferred route to tackle this problem for many of the authorities concerned. Many local authorities understand that they can have an impact on climate change by focusing on energy generation and energy efficiency programmes and see this as an area that is within their control, certainly so far as their own assets and land is concerned and one where they can demonstrate real progress.

Councils will have commercial activities and industries that operate within their locality. Large companies and SMEs will need to be on board with any target setting and the council will need to work closely with them. This will also apply to other public sector providers such as NHS, emergency services, etc. A council lead investment scheme such as a solar farm site with a private wire arrangement or district heating schemes may work well for the private and public sectors.

**This increased local authority engagement in the energy agenda supports APSE Energy's** vision of the municipalisation of energy. There is a clear role and opportunity for local authorities to explore their assets and assess how they can best be used for renewable energy developments, in order to transition to a carbon neutral council and/or locality. In doing so, there are also huge economic and social opportunities to be capitalised on.

All councils have assets that they can utilise to generate their own renewable energy as well as reducing the amount of energy used. Examples include, investing in solar panels on the town hall, installing a heat network that connects to industrial buildings or fitting combined heat and power in leisure centres. Leisure centres with swimming pools are heavy energy users, therefore generating renewable energy for use at these sites can make significant carbon and monetary savings.

When considering carbon neutrality, it is important to assess the energy usage across the council and locality **to identify key target areas. It can't just be about renewable energy** generation; it will take an overhaul of the workings of the council to increase energy efficiency and encourage behaviour change.

As users and owners of large fleets of vehicles, local authorities must take action towards electrifying their fleet if they are to meet their carbon neutrality targets. They must be seen to be leaders in the community by investing in low emission vehicles, installing charging infrastructure, encouraging low emission buses and taxis, establishing low emission zones, producing educational material and monitoring and publicising air quality data, amongst other actions. Actions such as these have added benefits such as dramatically improving air quality, reducing whole life and maintenance costs of vehicles and improving public transport.

Another area to consider when working towards being carbon neutral is the **procurement practices of the council. A local authority can't be fully carbon neutral if it imports goods** from supply chains that are carbon intensive. It is therefore important to look at ways to source food, materials, vehicles, etc. that can be certified as low/zero carbon.

The statement needs to be backed up by action and that means putting a programme in place that can take the local authority from point A to point B over a period of time, and there are many factors to influence such a programme. Is the statement made on behalf of the local authority or the locality? How well has the council performed historically? Are there arrangements in place to measure progress? What resources are available? Are plans in place already?

A Climate Emergency declaration can help to re-**invigorate a council's climate change**, sustainability, energy and related activities. In a perfect world, we would all be investing in this agenda, utilising the latest technology and working to get projects underway. However, we know there are limited resources so prioritising what we intend to do is vital.

A decision to be carbon-neutral reflects the ambition and ethos of the council but not meeting that target can say a lot about the council too. Councils need to be critically aware of the political risk of such a movement. If a target is set, aspirations laid down and work commences towards that goal, then progress simply has to be made. If not, the council concerned is taking considerable political risk that it will be held responsible at local level for that failure.

The scale of actions needed to meet the targets already set is huge, as this briefing has described. As with any large programme there are generic skills needed within the local authority if the programme is to be carried out successfully. These include project

management, drawing up action plans, communications, managing expectations with councillors, officers and external partners and ensuring all are, and will remain, on board with the programme in the long term.

## 6. How APSE Energy can help

Has your council declared a Climate Emergency? Do you have a plan to address it? Do you have the staff, capacity and expertise to put your plan into action?

APSE Energy was established to help inform and support local authorities in exactly this kind of situation. We can call on the experience and expertise from the 80 plus councils who are members of APSE Energy, our staff, associates, partners and from the wider local government family. This can come in the form of advisory groups and other meetings and events we hold, briefing notes on technologies and policy matters, research publications or consultancy work. Whatever the nature of the support, our approach means we look to **pass on our knowledge, take a whole council view and promote the local authority's work** in this sector.

By keeping our members up to date with developments in technologies, products and services, providing opportunities to network with other officers and councillors with similar responsibilities and working at the cutting edge of the energy sector we can help local authorities make the most of their assets to better deliver energy related projects, bring benefits to their communities and economies and meet their climate targets.

To discuss further please contact Phil Brennan, Head of APSE Energy, at [pbrennan@apse.org.uk](mailto:pbrennan@apse.org.uk) or Charlotte Banks, Energy Research and Project Officer, at [cbanks@apse.org.uk](mailto:cbanks@apse.org.uk) or on 0161 772 1810.

APSE is holding a National Policy Seminar in Liverpool on 12th July 2019, which will explore the climate change agenda and local authority Climate Emergency declarations. To reserve a place in advance for this seminar '**Climate Emergency: How is your council responding**' please email Vicky Starmer on [vstarmer@apse.org.uk](mailto:vstarmer@apse.org.uk).

APSE Energy is holding a workshop on Tuesday 25 June 2019 in Enfield titled 'Heat networks and Climate Emergencies – technologies to meet targets'. This is a free event for APSE Energy members. Non-members are also welcome to attend.

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