



**PLACE-BASED
CLIMATE ACTION
NETWORK**

MARCH 2024

ENABLING PLACE-BASED CLIMATE ACTION IN THE UK

**RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE PCAN
EXPERIENCE**



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**



ABOUT PCAN

The Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN) was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). It commenced in January 2019 and brought together the research community and decision-makers in the public, private and third sectors. PCAN consisted 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's ethos was to translate climate policy into action 'on the ground' in our communities. It supported a wider network of new and evolving climate commissions, including at county level (Surrey, Essex) and at regional level (Yorkshire and Humber), as well as many other city and other place-based climate commissions at different scales around the UK.

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

The Place-based Climate Action Network ended in April 2024. Legacy content can be found on the Grantham Institute website:
<https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute>

The archived PCAN website can be found here:
<https://pcancities.org.uk>



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This is a summary of key findings and recommendations from a report published by PCAN that was presented at PCAN's conference, Local Climate Action: Moving Out of Silos, at The Royal Society on 19 June 2023.

We present key findings on: how place-based climate action in the UK continues to grow; the new governance models emerging; the need for (and lack of) political leadership, and how local partnerships can lead to better outcomes.

The summary has recommendations for local authorities; communities and stakeholders; businesses, and national government and devolved administrations.

Contributing authors to the full report are listed below. Read the report here: <https://pcancities.org.uk/reports>

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Please cite as: Howarth C, Brogan J, Curran B, Duncan M, Fankhauser S, Gouldson A, Owen A, Stuart-Watt A (2023) Enabling Place-Based Climate Action in the UK: Recommendations from the PCAN Experience. A summary by the Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN), UK.

The views in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the ESRC or the host institutions.

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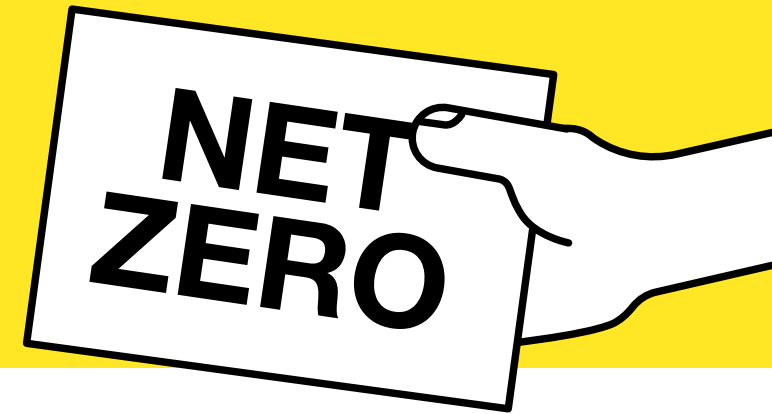
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our thanks to the following people for their input and comments on an earlier draft of the full report: Neil Jennings, Georgina Kyriacou, Carly McLachlan, and Simon Moore.

The PCAN team dedicated the report to the memory of Adeline Stuart-Watt who tragically passed away before its publication. Adeline played an important role in shaping the report and overseeing the incorporation of case studies.

This work was supported by the UK Economic and Social Research Council through the Place-Based Climate Action Network (PCAN) (Ref ES/S008381/1)

KEY FINDINGS



Place-based climate action in the UK continues to grow:

- Local councils and communities continue to push on climate action. Our survey of local climate commissions identifies powerful examples of place-based climate action in all parts of the country. However, the momentum seen in 2019 following climate emergency declarations has diminished.
- The climate focus of local councils and communities is broadening out from reducing emissions to wider climate strategies, including preparedness against current and future climate impacts. However, adaptation planning to climate change is still in its infancy and local synergies between adaptation and mitigation activities are not sufficiently exploited.

New governance models are emerging:

- Successful local engagement and partnership models have emerged across the country, often, but not always, in the form of climate commissions. These new institutions are proving to be effective platforms that local communities and stakeholders can use to engage, build consensus and convene new conversations. The diversity of local models speaks to the importance of place-based approaches.
- However, there are challenges (e.g. of time, enthusiasm and resourcing) to sustaining these models in terms of their impact and effectiveness and until they can be superseded by a more formalised and better resourced mechanism for place-based climate governance. Four out of seven local climate commissions find it harder or much harder to maintain work on climate action than they did a few years ago.

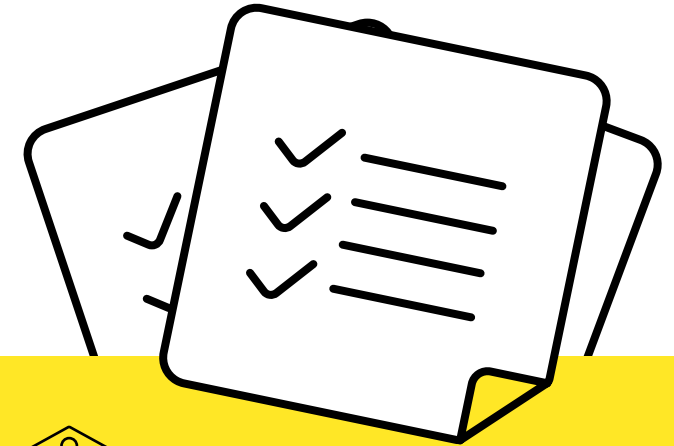
Political leadership is essential but lacking:

- Local climate commissions and partnerships are not a substitute for policy and political leadership. They enable shared responsibility across all actors (public, private, civic), but national and local policymakers must lead on the delivery of climate action and facilitate interconnections across scales to enable this.
- National and, to a lesser extent, devolved climate policy continues to ignore the vital importance of local communities in the effective and equitable delivery of climate targets. Over half of interviewed local commissions see ad hoc and intermittent national policies as a challenge to place-based climate action.

Local partnerships lead to better outcomes:

- Partnerships are vital to deliver net zero at every level of place, but that collaboration does not always happen naturally when working within organisational parameters. Cultural change is required in setting priorities and boundaries, alongside conscious and designed coordination with the capacity to deliver such collaborations.
- Organisational structures and partnerships with stated shared climate aims are emerging to facilitate collaboration and knowledge-sharing on climate action, but they share the challenges of longevity and resourcing experienced by climate commissions.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Local authorities should:

1. Move from the rhetoric of climate emergency declarations to action with locally supported, evidence-based climate action plans that tackle both mitigation and adaptation, allocating resources appropriately.
2. Adopt a partnership-based approach to local climate action, mobilising the energy and expertise of private, public and third sector actors.
3. Embed climate action fully into local decision-making and broader local strategies such as planning, economic development and health, so they are consistent with and support the delivery of place-based climate leadership.
4. Adopt an integrated approach to financing climate mitigation and adaptation needs, working with local communities and the private sector in devising locally attractive, fundable project portfolios.



Local communities and stakeholders should:

1. Broaden the scope of climate action beyond emission reduction (mitigation) to create synergies, emphasise co-benefits and encompass measures to reduce physical climate risks (adaptation), tackling wider societal challenges (e.g. public health, energy security) and reducing social and economic inequalities (just transition).
2. Formalise the drive for zero-carbon communities through institutional structures like climate commissions to provide an effective mechanism for delivering evidence and advice, and generate local collaboration through a platform to connect public, private and third sector actors.
3. Collaborate with local universities or other local agencies to improve the knowledge base on local climate action. Local action plans and progress reports need to be informed by the most recent data on local emissions, emission reduction potentials, vulnerability assessments and sustainable growth opportunities.
4. Participate in networks and platforms to share their experience and learn from each other, while being honest and transparent about where changes may be needed in everyone's priorities, choices and behaviours.



Local businesses should:

1. Play their part in leading and supporting place-based programmes of emissions reduction, recognising that the benefits of a net zero local economy cannot be delivered by local authorities and public investment alone.
2. Understand and address the climate impact of their own operations, and use their local influence to reduce area-wide emissions through their strategies, estates, investment, workforce, supply chains, logistics and procurement.
3. Recognise that changes to current operations and practice are necessary, but can also present opportunities for efficiencies and improvements that can help make the case for long-term investment.
4. Seek active collaborations with local partners to share knowledge, skills and investment into projects, programmes and infrastructure that support sustainable places.

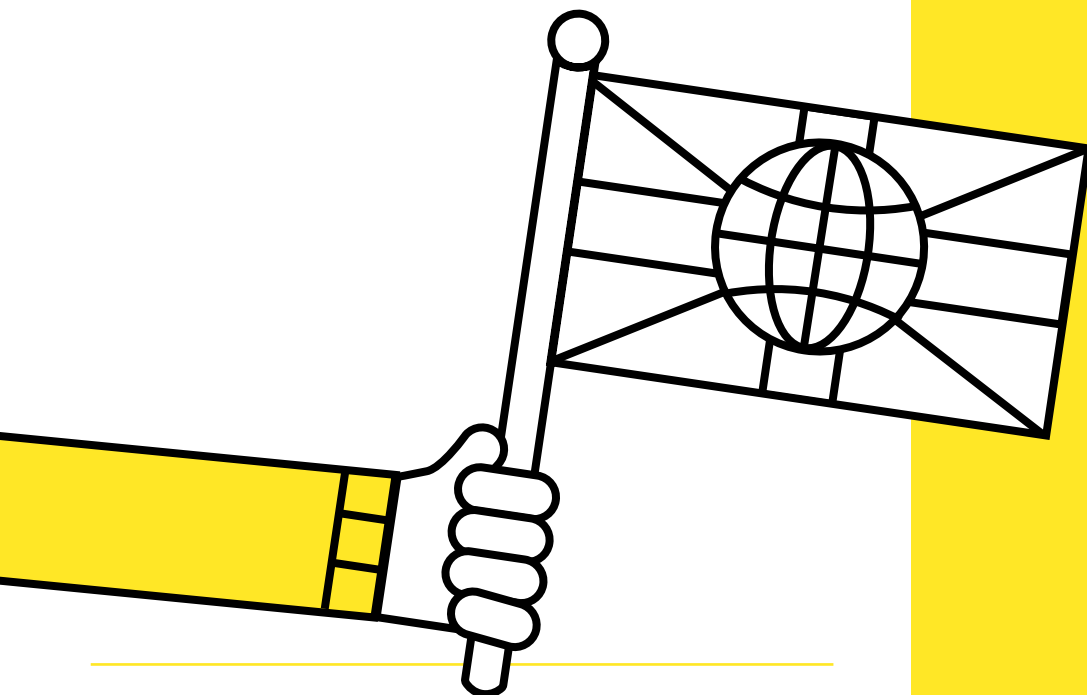


National government and the devolved administrations should:

1. Put in place a coherent framework to support local climate action (mitigation and adaptation together), backed by appropriate funds, resources and skills. Climate action requires joined-up interplay between national and local actors with clarity on longer-term funding and policy landscapes to enable coordinated approaches. Local action without national support will be challenging; national policy without local buy-in will fail.
2. Tackle the institutional and policy barriers holding back local climate action, to prevent national policy uncertainty and top-down approaches from hindering the energy, commitment and resources that place-based action can mobilise.
3. 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 in and responsive to local needs, and is often more ambitious than national action.
4. Support platforms to enable local climate action groups to share experience, learning and resources to unlock action.



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