

Written evidence submitted by Policy Connect (CAUK0026)

This document forms Policy Connect's response to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee's call for evidence on *Findings of the Report of Climate Assembly UK*.

Policy Connect is a membership-based, not-for-profit, cross-party think tank. We bring together parliamentarians and government in collaboration with academia, business and civil society to inform, influence and improve UK public policy through debate, research and innovative thinking, so as to improve peoples' lives.

We lead and manage an extensive network of seventeen all-party parliamentary groups, research commissions, forums and campaigns in key policy areas including: health; education & skills; industry, technology & innovation; and sustainability. We shape policy in Westminster through meetings, events, research and impact work.

Policy Connect is submitting written evidence based on our longstanding expertise in sustainability policy. We draw on the wide-ranging evidence and stakeholder input from industry, academia, and the third sector we combine by managing the All-Party Parliamentary Sustainable Resource Group (APSRG); the Sustainable Resource Forum (SRF); the All-Party Parliamentary Climate Change Group (APCCG); Carbon Connect (CC), and the Westminster Sustainable Business Forum (WSBF).

1. Has Climate Assembly UK (both its process and recommendations) been helpful to your work (or the work of your organisation), and if so, how?

Yes.

It has helped with our and industry's awareness of attitudes towards net zero strategies and solutions. It has informed our work and continues to help guide our research, inquiries and discussions to make sure the public will engage positively with the changes required in the UK's transition to a low-carbon economy. Specifically, it influences our ongoing work in low-carbon heating, energy efficiency, retrofitting, buildings and delivery of net zero.

The recommendations of the Climate Assembly have informed the outcomes of our [Pipeline to 2050](#) report. In particular, the context of how the assembly participants and the general public see the question of heat decarbonisation, and how that fits with findings of industry, academia and policymakers, has been very informative for the report's recommendations.

These include the following tests for the Heat and Buildings Strategy¹:

- Make public engagement a vital part of the Heat and Buildings Strategy to ensure that the issues of heat decarbonisation are properly understood.
- Where appropriate and desired, give people a voice in making decisions on low carbon heating and ensure a participatory low carbon heat transition.
- Provide consumers with impartial, localised, visible and free advice from trained advisors.
- Put forward an update of consumer protections: ensure that the rights of consumers are the same regardless of the technologies they use to obtain their heat and energy.

¹ Policy Connect (2020), *Pipeline to 2050: Building the Foundations for a Harmonised Heat Strategy*, p. 9

- Provide high-level guidelines regarding the net zero consistent level of choice for households, the required engagement with communities and ground rules around disruption to households.

Further, the Climate Assembly recommendations lay the groundwork for part of the Net Zero Delivery Architecture inquiry that Policy Connect is undertaking together with Darren Jones MP, Alexander Stafford MP and Wera Hobhouse MP, of which public engagement forms a central part.

2. What impact has Climate Assembly UK had across your sector, and more widely?

Policy Connect hosted a discussion on the recommendations from the Climate Assembly, focussing on public awareness, information and education. From the discussion we concluded that there is low awareness amongst the general public about the need for policy change and extent of the steps that will need to be taken to reach net zero by 2050. Taking the carbon budgets as an example, we are not on track to deliver by 2050, which most people are unaware of, and they have little general understanding of what the carbon budgets are. As such, there is a need for more and better nationwide education and awareness raising to ensure people are up to date with the changes to come and how they will affect their lives, as well as ways for them to be involved in setting priorities. The Climate Assembly has been a welcome chance to take people through some of the details on big decisions on the future of the gas grid, the importance of high-efficiency heat pumps, low-carbon heating and hydrogen. We understand that very few people are aware of the contribution of heat to climate change and, according to consumers, low-carbon alternatives are rarely advertised at intervention points, such as when a boiler breaks and needs to be replaced. There appears to be a gap between people's support for nuclear power and the government's commitment to using nuclear sources of energy, which will need to be addressed given the current plans in the carbon budgets.

3. How do you perceive Climate Assembly UK to have affected the work of Government since the Assembly's report was published (10 September 2020)? To what extent do the Government's actions since then reflect Climate Assembly UK's recommendations?

We note the continued absence of government focus on heating and retrofitting so far and continue to await publication of the Heat and Buildings Strategy. We also consider the premature closure of the Green Homes Grant to be at odds with Climate Assembly recommendations.

We do welcome a number of good points in the 10-point plan and energy white paper (e.g. support for off-shore wind which the public is in favour of), but require much more detail regarding the government's public engagement plans, which we hope will be set out in the Heat and Buildings and other strategies.

4. What would a good response to Climate Assembly UK from the Government look like? What would a good response from Parliament look like?

Climate Assembly was an excellent initiative by the BEIS Select Committee to trial novel approaches to public engagement around net zero. Yet public engagement is an ongoing process. Government and Parliament must see Climate Assembly as the start of this process, not the end.

We encourage BEIS to build on Climate Assembly UK and develop a suite of approaches and methods to ensure the public are actively engaged through the net zero transition. These methods should be embedded across all policy initiatives. BEIS should also bring out a specific public engagement strategy detailing their approach.

Specifically with relation to the low-carbon heat transition, an area where the need for public engagement is particularly acute, we recommend:

- A nationwide information campaign.
- Regional awareness strategies and local community-led schemes, potentially including community-owned heat, roadshows or showrooms.
- Citizens' juries type arrangements to shape heat strategies at a national or regional level.
- Processes to map, monitor and incorporate public engagement initiatives with low carbon heat into policymaking on an on-going basis.

Further details on these recommendations can be found in our Uncomfortable Home Truths report, which received the endorsement of then Climate Change Minister Lord Duncan of Springbank².

On 26 November 2020, Policy Connect held an online roundtable to discuss low-carbon heat policy recommendations from the Climate Assembly report.

In aid of the delivery of net-zero heating, government should consider a dedicated delivery body for a joined-up approach across different governance levels as well as for public engagement. There is a need for cooperation between national and local authorities, industry, supply chains and civil society. Partnerships will be essential to deliver low-carbon heating, requiring a cohesive national framework as well as local-level action. A key role for such a delivery body would be to engage with the public and lead nation-wide campaigns to build support for net-zero measures. People will need to feel personally invested in the national strategy to reach net zero. Part of this is about trusting that their investment in certain technologies is money well spent and that it will fit into wider strategies and decarbonisation pathways, especially in the case of early adopters. So people have to want to transition to net zero in order for any strategy to be successful, and it will take time for any cultural shift to take place.

There is a need for a shift in mentality from traditional forms of heating to a new, more integrated approach to energy and heating systems. People should feel it benefits them directly to retrofit their homes, despite the disruption it might cause in the immediate term. New forms of heating should provide consumers with an experience that is as good as, if not better than, current forms of heating. Their involvement in the process to create solutions, as well as the option to try out products, is therefore important so that there is early buy-in from the public and thus an increased potential for future demand.

Government should recognise and incentivise new business models, which are part of the innovations required to reach net zero. This should be accompanied by a shift in thinking about business models and customer propositions. Most of the technology needed is now available; one of the biggest hurdles is getting these technologies to customers through profitable markets. This should include smarter consumer protection. As some innovations are set to fail through trial and error, we need to allow business to experiment whilst protecting consumers from mistakes.

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² Policy Connect (2019), *Uncomfortable Home Truths: Why Britain Urgently Needs a Low Carbon Heat Strategy*, p. 48

