

Written evidence from Fairer World Lindfield

Written evidence on the NAO report: "Local Government and Net Zero"

Submitted by Peter Desmond on behalf of Fairer World Lindfield

Introduction:

1. **Fairer World Lindfield** (FWL) is a community group raising awareness & encouraging local personal & collective action on the climate & ecological crisis. Through small steps we can help mitigate climate change with a vision for a better world for future generations.
2. FWL has been engage with their local councils to encourage them to speed up and scale up their climate action plans. So we are witness to the huge challenges councils face and the many barriers to action.
3. We are responding to this call for evidence because it is clear to us that, without a national framework, supportive national policies and significant extra resources, local authorities have little chance of driving the level of change needed to meet this global emergency.
4. There is a lot that local community groups can do to support and work alongside local authorities in driving this agenda. But without joined-up action between different levels of government, we feel that all our efforts are being blunted.

Executive Summary:

5. **Some local councils have taken action to address the challenges they face in respect with the climate and ecological crisis**
6. **Community groups have a role to play to support local councils in combating the adverse impacts of the climate and ecological crisis**

Detailed Explanations:

7. **The challenges that some local councils have with climate change and the action they have taken:**
 - Central Government has not set out a roadmap, timeline or action plan for the UK to achieve net zero by 2050 which would need to be communicated to local councils
 - Some councils are only just beginning to recognise their responsibilities with respect to the climate emergency e.g. one council didn't have any specific climate policies until Fairer World Lindfield suggested they declare a climate emergency

- Not looking at the carbon emission beyond the Council itself e.g. one council doesn't have a plan for engaging the wider community and not proposing to pension scheme to divest from fossil fuels
- Councils don't have costed roadmaps towards net zero e.g. one council no longer developing a clear sustainability strategy with a roadmap
- Community Action Groups are not engaged with climate action plans e.g. one council has developed a sustainability framework based on Project Drawdown but no costed action plan to achieve these goals
- No local village, town, district or county council in our area has a costed plan which forms part of any nationally coordinated action plan
- Insufficient engagement by local councils with businesses, residents and community groups on how each stakeholder can contribute to achieving net zero.
- The number of officers engaged on climate issues is very limited in our area and are not always given the right level of resources and support
- Whilst there is targeted financial support for net zero initiatives from central government to local authorities, there is generally a lack of broad funding support for ambitious climate goals at local level

8. Community groups have a role to play to support local councils in combating the adverse impacts of the climate and ecological crisis

Since Fairer World Lindfield was established in 2019, we have engaged with our village, nearby town, district and county councils in different ways:

- Asked a question about the lack of a climate roadmap at a meeting of a council about action plans and reporting mechanisms for its climate pledges
- Establishment of Central Sussex Climate Network to support local councils in their climate plans through the sharing of knowledge and good practice between different councils
- Through our events Informed councillors and policy officers on the ecological and climate implications of their policies
- Raised awareness amongst councillors of need for cycle lanes and better public transport systems
- Petitioned council to consider divesting from fossil fuels
- Invited a council sustainability policy officer to speak at a climate conference about the importance of pollinators
- Assisted sustainability policy officers to devise strategies to engage councils and councillors on climate issues

9. Findings from FWL Experience

Three key elements have emerged from the approach adopted by Fairer World Lindfield:

- Encouraging councillors to make climate mitigation and adaptation a key part of their work
- Collaboration through co-organising events
- Holding policy makers to account to ensure they develop realistic action plans to achieve ambitious goals

10. Recommendations to Central Government in order to address the Climate and Ecological Emergency:

- A **flexible national framework** with priorities, targets and timescales. This should not be so prescriptive as to deflect proactive councils from their progress. An example of a local government implementing a framework is Haywards Heath Town Council: https://www.haywardsheath.gov.uk/Environment_30439.aspx
- A **coordinated national approach** with clear lines of responsibility and expectations.
- A **clear central lead** for net zero.
- New **statutory responsibilities** for local authorities to lead, set out plans and monitor and report on area wide emissions. A clear expectation that local government has a key leadership role to play, and responsibility for, the emissions of their whole local area.
- That councils be given a **statutory duty to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies**.
- **Central advice with priority setting** – councils may need help to identify priorities for action and work quickly toward the biggest gains.
 - A **national climate communications strategy** consistent from top to bottom.
 - **Communications resources** for councils to use (similar to Covid where we have posters in our streets, social media campaigns, graphs/interactive maps showing progress etc)
 - A **national knowledge sharing framework**, sharing resources and good practice.
 - **Good practice should be disseminated** and local authorities should be encouraged to set up climate assemblies, climate forums, partnerships etc
 - Community groups need **attractive, simple Government schemes** to promote in their communities (some like the Renewable Heat Incentive have been too complex to get good take up).

- **Contradictions in central planning policy** need to be sought out and corrected urgently, so that all national policies are aligned with and prioritise net zero.
- That the **funding, resources and skills** available for local authority climate work be increased in quantity and quality urgently to reflect the scale of the challenge

CONCLUSIONS:

11. There are now three recent reports that make these issues and solutions clear: “Local Authorities and the 6th Carbon Budget” (Climate Change Commission), “Power Shift” (UK 100) and “Local Government and Net Zero in England” from the NAO.
12. FWL calls for the Government to adopt the recommendations of these reports urgently so that central and local governments’ efforts to tackle the climate and ecological emergency can be joined up in a national framework of practical, measurable and impactful action. If the UK is to show global leadership as it hosts COP26, urgent co-ordinated action is required across all departments within central government and between all layers of central and local government.

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