

## **Written evidence from Folkestone & Hythe District Council**

**Question 1: What should local authorities' roles and responsibilities in reaching net zero by 2050 be? How clear are the expectations about the role of local authorities?**

### Folkestone & Hythe District Council Response

The council considers that local authorities have a crucial role to play in UK achieving its net zero target by 2050 due to the statutory powers of local authorities, regarding social housing, transportation, waste management, land use planning and other areas, and through their ability to influence residents, businesses and visitors.

Areas of activity for local authorities could include the following:

- Place-based planning;
- Local climate partnerships and community engagement;
- Enabling and coordinated decarbonisation policies and strategies;
- Training, capacity and resource building;
- Sustainable procurement practice;
- Considering climate impacts in decision-making; and
- Aligning local authorities' spending and investment decisions to promote emissions reduction goals.

However, it must be recognised that, if local authorities are to fulfil their full potential in leading and influencing change, they must be adequately resourced to play their part (see response to Question 4).

**Question 2: What are the priorities for change or clarification to align the national planning framework with net zero?**

### Folkestone & Hythe District Council Response

Current policy, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (July 2021), is largely framed in a reactive way, for example, the prominent definition of sustainable development set out in section 2 of the NPPF includes, in relation to

climate change, “mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy” (paragraph 8 c).

Section 14 of the NPPF, ‘Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change’ includes more aspirational text, but this is caveated (‘help to’, ‘contribute to’) in ways that diminish its effectiveness; for example, that the planning system “should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in green gas emissions ...” and that new development “should be planned for in ways that: ... can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as through its location, orientation and design.” Policy for adapting to the effects of climate change is clearer and more specific than policy aimed at reducing carbon emissions.

**Question 3: What will need to be in place to ensure that the UK infrastructure bank loans to local authorities for net zero work are as effective as possible?**

Folkestone & Hythe District Council Response

The council welcomes the UK Infrastructure Bank’s two core objectives to:

- Help to tackle climate change, particularly meeting the Government’s net zero emissions target by 2050; and
- Support regional and local economic growth through better connectedness, opportunities for new jobs and higher levels of productivity.

It should be recognised that, having declared a climate and ecological emergency, many local authorities have set more stretching targets than reaching net zero emissions by 2050, and this could be recognised in the Infrastructure Bank’s financing decisions, by giving priority to the most ambitious authorities.

While the focus on construction and new technology is understandable, there is a danger, as illustrated by the Infrastructure Bank’s Policy Design document, that finance is directed chiefly to “complex, large, novel and long-term [projects], with risks around construction, and technological or government policy changes” (paragraph 1.11). This is reinforced later in the document when it states that finance will be provided to local authorities for “high value and complex economic infrastructure projects” (paragraph 3.8).

While such projects will no doubt be needed in the country's move to net zero emissions, finance should also be made available for other initiatives, schemes that may not be novel, complex, one-off construction projects, but simple, using tried technologies, and which, with financing from the bank, could be rolled-out quickly at scale across a local authority area. Given that the bank is to be established over several phases, with a general focus on long-term schemes, many opportunities could be lost before the first large-scale schemes are completed and begin to realise savings in carbon emissions.

There also needs to be recognition of the embedded carbon in new construction; this needs to be addressed and is something that local authorities could have some influence over.

The success of the infrastructure bank will depend on the level of support available to local authorities, recognising problems of local capacity (Policy Design, paragraph 3.10). It is welcomed that one of the focuses will be on "addressing capacity gaps among many local authorities, who may not have the expertise to develop, structure and deliver complex infrastructure projects", but this reinforces the point made above, that there may be simpler schemes within the sphere of existing expertise, that, with appropriate financial support, could be delivered, and realise carbon benefits, much more quickly.

**Question 4: What funding and resources are available for local authority work on net zero, and what are the priorities for improving local authority funding?**

Folkestone & Hythe District Council Response

The council is aware of the following funding resources available for local authority work on net zero:

- Home Energy Performance Retrofit – funding for installation of energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating systems in domestic properties;
- Low carbon heating technology innovation: grant scheme – grants to develop technologies that reduce carbon emissions associated with providing heat and hot water to UK buildings;

- Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund – aimed at registered providers of social housing to improve energy performance of social homes; and
- Phase 2 of the Public Sector Low Carbon Skills Fund – provides funding for eligible public sector bodies to develop heat decarbonisation plans for their estates.
- The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme - provides grants for public sector bodies to fund heat decarbonisation and energy efficiency measures.

The council is currently pursuing some of the funding sources listed above, and investigating the potential of others, but it can be difficult to make use of these sources without expert technical support. It would also help to have a more stable funding regime, where there is more transparency in the bidding process and more time is given to prepare bids and to deliver projects. Currently many bidding rounds have very short timescales which means that only 'shovel-ready' projects are likely to be successful.

In addition, the council has allocated significant monies from its own reserves to tackle carbon emissions and develop projects to mitigate and adapt to climate change, but this does pose a challenge for a local authority, such as Folkestone & Hythe, which has to balance competing service demands while seeking to prioritise action on climate change.

Priority areas for future local authority funding should include:

- Decarbonisation of transportation;
- Energy efficiency in the built environment;
- Green space and infrastructure;
- Natural capital; and
- Mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change.

**Question 5: What should the government's analysis of net zero funding to local authorities focus on in the next Spending Review?**

Folkestone & Hythe District Council Response

See the council's response to Question 4. Carbon emissions data indicate that the great majority of emissions from the district's administrative area come from the existing building stock and transport. Although action through the planning system is vitally important, this can only affect new development and those refurbishments that require planning permission; the greatest reductions will be secured by improving the energy efficiency of existing homes and commercial buildings and by reducing the need for journeys and improving the availability, safety and ease of sustainable transport options. The council considers that these areas should therefore be the focus for net zero funding.

**Question 6: How is central government co-ordinating its engagement with local government on net zero?**

Folkestone & Hythe District Council Response

See the council's response to Question 4. While the council is active in pursuing opportunities for funding, it can be difficult to make use of these sources without expert technical support. Government could consider appointing 'Green Champions', named contacts who could work across Government departments, liaising with local authorities in a specific area to make them aware of funding opportunities, new policy initiatives and sources of information and expertise.

**Question 7: What role can local community groups play in helping local authorities achieve their net zero ambitions?**

Folkestone & Hythe District Council Response

Local authorities are often best placed to understand the needs and opportunities that arise within their local communities, as shaped through active engagement with key stakeholder groups within the private, public, voluntary and third-sector organisations, communication and consultation on their net zero ambitions.

Local communities groups play an integral role in communicating and demonstrating the benefits of actions taken to improve our environment and quality of life of the people.

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