

Written evidence submitted by Medway Council

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Medway Council declared a climate emergency in April 2019 and has committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions across Medway by 2050. This submission represents Medway Council's views on the need for central government to improve its approach to effective working with local authorities on the net zero agenda.
- 1.2 It should be noted that this is a brief response to the consultation as there has been a very limited amount of time to consider the consultation due to it being released during the summer holiday period. Officers were only made aware of the consultation through the South East Climate Alliance in mid-August.

2 Consultation Questions

- 2.1 *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?*
- 2.2 *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?*
- 2.3 *What funding and resources are available for local authority work on net zero, and what are the priorities for improving local authority funding?*
- 2.4 *What should government's analysis of net zero funding to local authorities focus on in the next Spending Review?*
- 2.5 *How is central government co-ordinating its engagement with local government on net zero?*
- 2.6 *What are the priorities for change or clarification to align the national planning framework with net zero?*

3 Submission

- 3.1 Medway Council is supportive of the 'Blueprint for accelerating climate action and green recovery level' document which sets out the national leadership, policies, powers and funding needed to empower local authorities to deliver at scale, working together with communities and businesses: <https://www.adeptnet.org.uk/documents/blueprint-accelerating-climate-action-and-green-recovery-local-level>
- 3.2 Local authorities *can and should* have a pivotal role at local level to lead by example and disseminate relevant information and best practice to all residents and business within their areas. However, we cannot do this alone and there needs to be close working relationships and guidance from Government to ensure we all work together to achieve net zero. It has been unclear from Government on the role expected for local government and where the level of responsibility will lie.

- 3.3 Local authorities need legislation, powers, and funding to support them in achieving net zero for their communities/businesses. It is important to note that in 2018/19, Medway Council's carbon footprint represents just 1.4% of the total direct emissions in the Medway area. So, to achieve net zero for the district we will need the powers, legislation, and incentives to ensure our businesses, residents and communities support us, and receive the support from us, on the journey to net zero.
- 3.4 Local authorities need significant funding and resources to support the changes which are required for a low carbon and climate resilient future. A recent assessment identified that funding of more than £11.7m would be needed to bring forward the measures to meet the Council's First Carbon Budget (by 2027), which is far beyond existing Council budgets. Electrifying the RCV fleet (including infrastructure to support the transition) will also run into £millions, adding a further financial burden. If Government is committed to net zero, especially at an accelerated pace, it needs to consider the implications of this new burden in the annual settlement for each local authority area.
- 3.5 Local authorities, particularly those with social care responsibilities, are already under significant financial strain exacerbated by the pandemic, and it is increasingly difficult to fund initiatives that are not deliverable on an invest to save basis. If the Government is serious about impacting climate change, it should allocate funding to local authorities based on the delivery of their action plans and the impact on the government's overall target, rather than the forcing authorities to compete through bidding processes. Competitive bidding is not transparent, and risks funding being allocated to those authorities who have the most resources available to spend time on bids.
- 3.6 Funding needs to be long term, as one-year local government finance settlements and one-off allocations do not support councils to invest in and plan for decarbonising in a sustainable way.
- 3.7 Funding windows need to be open for longer and support needs to be given to local authorities to allow them to make successful bids. It would also be useful to have a coordinated approach to the release of funding from different Government departments, to be given adequate notice of when funding will be available. A funding programme for the year would be beneficial for forward planning.
- 3.8 We would welcome more funding support packages for local/small businesses being made available with simple application processes.
- 3.9 A list of national priorities with high carbon savings for the UK, would be a useful tool for local authorities. This may help to identify where spending should be prioritised if funding sources are limited for example, public transport, energy efficient homes, street lighting replacements, EV charging points, tree planting and other green carbon sinks.
- 3.10 Local authorities would benefit from a consistent, simple, free reporting tool to measure progress towards net zero and the ability to compare progress against other similar individual local authorities (unitary, district, rural, urban etc), similar to waste data flow. It may be worth considering the benefit of statutory returns.

- 3.11 This should also be available to SMEs with clear simple guidance on how assessments should be undertaken and reported.
- 3.12 A carbon literacy programme being made available *fully free of charge to local authorities and businesses*; this could perhaps be backed by a carbon reduction support programme, similar to how WRAP (Waste Resource Action Programme) has supported waste needs of local authorities and businesses over many years.
- 3.13 There needs to be more support and engagement and *national lead*, on carbon reduction information, for instance Medway Council encourage national campaigns which support working towards net zero (for example Clean Air Day).
- 3.14 As noted in the introduction to this submission, improved engagement with local authorities could include ensuring local authorities are aware of consultations/engagement material and launching them at convenient times (i.e., not during the summer holiday period) to allow submission of full considered responses.
- 3.15 Despite the need for more engagement and support it should be noted that Medway Council has had a very good working relationship with the Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy Department in regard to Heat Network Delivery Unit funding bids.
- 3.16 Local authorities are unable to wait for a review and require rapid change in the national planning framework to ensure houses that are being built now support net zero targets (both in terms of building and living). There is a need to ensure that local authorities have the powers they need via planning and building regulations to require all new homes to be zero carbon before 2025.

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