



**Friends of
the Earth**

Frequently Asked Questions: Local carbon budgets

This briefing supplements Friends of the Earth's Local Carbon Budgets briefing available at http://foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/local_carbon_budgets.pdf.

Why is local action needed? Aren't national policies more important?

Both big national policies, like ending coal and supporting offshore wind, and local action are needed.

Locally coordinated action to cut emissions is cost effective, makes deeper cuts possible, and is vital for developing society's 'buy-in' for the changes needed.

Some policies like developing community heat and improving local transport systems can only be delivered by coordinated local action. Other policies like insulating houses are much more cost effective – and likely to have a much bigger take-up – if done on a coordinated street by street basis.

Hasn't the Government already got good climate plans for the next decade?

No: the Committee on Climate Change says a step-change in delivery of Government plans is needed if we are to meet UK Climate Change Act targets. Local carbon budgets are a way of ramping up action and getting more happening on the ground.

In December 2010 the Committee on Climate Change recommended toughening national targets for 2020 to make sure longer term targets can be met cost-effectively. This would require more action than the Government is currently planning.

Aren't duties on councils a thing of the past – what about localism?

Local carbon budgets are the best way to combine localism with the national effort to cut carbon. They would allow flexibility for councils to work with local partners and communities to tailor solutions that work for local areas, whilst ensuring that enough action is taken.

This is completely in line with the commitment to a 'power shift' away from Whitehall to the local level, while acknowledging that everyone has a responsibility to build a low-carbon economy and help to tackle climate change. Meeting the UK Climate Change Act means every sector of the economy and tier of Government has to do its bit. It is impractical, as well as unfair, for enthusiastic areas to compensate for laggards.

Voluntary action hasn't been sufficient to meet the challenge. And in a time of tough cuts, a duty would help councils to prioritise the action needed.

Some councils are leading trailblazing work but most are not doing anywhere near enough. Fewer than 15 per cent set meaningful carbon targets under the previous voluntary performance framework: National Indicator NI186.

The Local Government Association's Climate Change Commission agreed, saying in 2007 that it expected all councils to act on climate and that *"a statutory duty should be imposed on those councils that, within the next two years, do not respond to climate change."*

There is a relevant parallel with public health. The Government intends¹ to give councils "responsibility, backed by ring-fenced budgets and new freedoms" for improving public health in their communities – because "embedding public health within local government will make it easier to create tailored local solutions in order to meet local needs. It will also enable joint approaches to be taken with other areas of local government's work... and with key partners." Just like public health, the cross-cutting nature of climate change and the need to make plans work for local places means the Government should extend this local approach to cover carbon reduction as well.

Don't councils already have responsibility for cutting carbon?

No. There are no requirements for councils to cut carbon (though the Carbon Reduction Commitment will incentivise cuts from their own operations). The existing system for local area carbon reduction was entirely voluntary, and in any case has been abolished by the coalition Government. As set out above, voluntary action has so far not delivered, and we do not have the luxury of time.

Why should councils prioritise carbon reduction at a time of financial cuts?

Action to cut carbon is good for local people, businesses and economies. It saves money on energy bills, increases energy security and resilience, cuts congestion and increases productivity through better transport, and creates jobs and expertise in local areas.

And it's good for councils too. Going green could be a financial lifeline for cash-strapped local authorities: for example cutting fuel bills, and raising money through selling green energy.

Leading councils have realised this and are trying to press on with their plans in the face of funding cuts. But national government must support councils to get green schemes off the ground.

"If public bodies fail to play their part in relation to the challenges of climate change – perhaps taking the view that resolving local financial problems must take precedence – the consequence will be much greater challenges and costs facing future generations of taxpayers."
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and CIPFA 'After the downturn' (2009)

How will local carbon budgets be paid for?

However the Government chooses to meet UK Climate Change Act commitments and build a thriving low-carbon economy, it will require money. What matters is making sure that the whole of the UK is both engaged with and reaping the benefits of the transition to the low-carbon economy – and that delivery is cost-effective and works for the places people live, travel around and work.

Local carbon budgets will not cut 'extra' carbon, and will not cost 'extra' money. A small amount of upfront support will be needed for councils to undertake work to assess what can be done to cut carbon locally, and to draw up climate change plans.

Other sources of funding include the forthcoming Green Deal (which will offer loans for energy efficiency improvements in homes and businesses to be repaid through savings on energy bills), the Green Investment Bank, Feed-in Tariffs (especially now that councils can now sell electricity to the grid) and the Renewable Heat Incentive.

¹ http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_121941

Are local carbon budgets too complicated?

No: local carbon budgets would improve upon the previous National Indicator 186 system and build upon existing best practice that is working for trailblazing councils. The only untested element of the scheme is the allocation of the size of the local carbon budget. How would the local carbon budgets be set fairly?

Friends of the Earth is proposing that the size of a fair local carbon budget should be informed by two factors:

- the need to meet UK Climate Change Act targets
- local circumstances

It will be up to Government to decide whether and how it chooses to negotiate the size of local carbon budgets with local authorities.

Independent research for Friends of the Earth shows that emissions can be cut in all types of local authority area – rural and urban – broadly in line with the UK Climate Change Act targets. Different combinations of green measures and financial support will be needed, as well as guaranteed action at the national level – for example, to decarbonise the national electricity supply.

What if a power station or an airport is in the local authority area?

The scope of local carbon budgets would be based on the existing DECC NI186 data that monitors local emissions. This excludes emissions from some sources – including motorways, military emissions and large industrial sites (those within the EU Emissions Trading Scheme).

Emissions from a power station like Drax would not be allocated to the local carbon budget for the council area in which it is situated. The system would allocate emissions on the basis of where the energy is ultimately used – in homes and workplaces in all local areas across the UK.

However the detail of the classification under the new local carbon budgets system should be determined by Government in consultation with councils and other stakeholders.

How are local emissions measured?

It is quite straightforward to measure the scale of energy use – and therefore emissions – in each local area. This is currently done through meter readings and, for transport, through combinations of traffic count data and modelling. This would be sufficient to base local carbon budgets measurements on, although data improvements should be introduced including faster and more detailed data, and better information about the carbon intensity of cars on local roads.

Would local carbon budgets apply to the UK or just England?

Local carbon budgets would be for local authorities in England.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have devolved responsibility for local government. It would be for the devolved administrations to determine how their portion of 'locally attributable' emissions in the national UK carbon budget would be reduced. In practice Scotland and Wales already have strategies to meet this challenge.

Do councils have the powers to meet local carbon budgets?

Yes: some councils are already carrying out the kind of locally coordinated action that would be needed to meet local carbon budgets.

Friends of the Earth is working with councils to identify extra powers that could support even more action such as a duty on local partners to cooperate in delivering action to meet local carbon budgets. It is also expected that councils will be given a general power of competence in the Decentralisation and Localism Bill.

Cutting local emissions also requires national Government to get its policies right – councils are not expected to make all of the emissions cuts themselves.

How will Government ensure local carbon budgets are met?

As with the UK Climate Change Act, the main driver for change will not be legal or financial penalties, but clarity on what is needed, political commitment and a transparent and accountable way of delivering the action needed.

A combination of factors will need to be in place for local carbon budgets to be met including:

- clarity from national Government about what is expected of councils and local partners
- guidance and best-practice sharing on how to draw up and deliver local climate change strategies
- financial, technical and political support for green measures in local climate change strategies
- transparency about progress towards delivering local climate change strategies
- action from local delivery partners such as schools, hospitals, businesses and residents

Would local carbon budgets undermine the Climate Change Act?

No: local carbon budgets would make councils responsible for drawing up a climate change strategy consistent with meeting their local carbon budget, and working with partners to carry out the measures in the strategy.

The Secretary of State would remain responsible for ensuring the national carbon budgets in the UK Climate Change Act are met. It would be in the interests of the Secretary of State to support councils in delivering their strategies.

Will it apply just to top-tier councils or to districts as well?

All councils need to be part of locally coordinated action to cut carbon. For many local authorities, developing and delivering strategies to meet local carbon budgets will work best in partnership with neighbouring local authorities such as city regions, or with county and district councils working together. The system would allow flexibility for councils to decide the most productive local relationships to deliver the action needed.

Further information

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