



# 1000 CITIES

FOR CARBON FREEDOM

**CLIMATE ACTION BEST  
PRACTICES IN UK CITIES**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1000 CITIES would like to thank the following contributors for their time taken to conduct interviews for this case study report:

**Birmingham:** [Jonathan Trew](#), District Chief Executive; [Naomi Todd](#), Head of Sustainability; [Maria Dunn](#), Head of Development Policy

**Cardiff:** [Gareth Harcombe](#), Energy and Sustainability Manager, Cardiff City Council; [Tim Gordon](#), Head of Corporate Communications and Community Affairs, Cardiff City Council; [Nikki Fitzgerald](#), Environment and Communities Division, Welsh Government

**Glasgow:** [Duncan Booker](#), Chief Resilience Officer, on secondment to the COP26 organising team

**Hull:** [Martin Budd](#), Environment and Climate Change Strategic Advisor, Hull City Council

**Leeds:** [Cllr Lisa Mulherin](#), Executive Member for Climate Change, Transport and Sustainable Development; [Neil Evans](#), Director of Resources & Housing, Leeds City Council Chief Executive's Office

**Liverpool:** [Cllr Laura Robertson-Collins](#), Cabinet Member - Environment and Sustainability, Liverpool City Council; [Michael Doran](#), Communications Manager, Liverpool City Council

**London:** [Jazmin Burgess](#), Principal Policy and Programme Officer, City of London

**Manchester:** [Jonny Sadler](#), Programme Director, Manchester Climate Change Agency

**Newcastle:** [Tom Warburton](#), Director of City Futures, Newcastle City Council; [Sajda Nawaz-Bhatti](#), Policy and Communications Business Partner, Newcastle City Council; [Tim Rippon](#), Climate Change Specialist, Newcastle City Council

**Oxford:** [Emily Green](#), Citizens Assembly Officer & Climate Emergency Support, Oxford City Council

**Somerset:** [Michele Cusack](#), Director Economic and Community Infrastructure Commissioning, Somerset County Council

Funding provided by:

Authors:



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# INTRODUCTION

Many UK cities have been recognised locally and internationally for their groundbreaking work on climate action. They have positioned themselves as leaders, putting in place and acting upon ambitious emissions reductions targets aligned with the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global temperature increase to “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to further limit the increase to 1.5°C.”<sup>1</sup> At the same time, these cities have and continue to face many challenges in meeting the ambitious targets that they have set.

There is much about climate action that British cities can learn from one another and that local governments around the world can learn from them. With this in mind, this report shares insights and provides best practice recommendations from case studies of 12 UK local governments: Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Oxford, and Somerset. The pages that follow draw lessons from their persistent efforts to advance climate action and their willingness to honestly and boldly reflect on the action that is required.

## CITIES ARE CRITICAL TO CLIMATE ACTION

We have already begun to feel the negative impacts of climate change. According to the global scientific community, we face the risk of these impacts becoming catastrophic and irreversible if we continue with current rates of land degradation and fossil fuel use. Urgent, transformational action is needed from everyone, everywhere, with no corner left unturned.

Cities are crucial to the effort to combat climate change, as they directly or indirectly influence approximately 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>2</sup> Cities are also at the forefront of climate action, since they can implement solutions at impactful scales, but are often also able to put policies and strategies in place over relatively quick timeframes compared to higher levels of government. With their leadership, innovation, and nimbleness, cities are magnifying their efforts by sharing and comparing their efforts and resources, in what has become a global movement of municipal climate action.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report can be used by cities interested in developing and implementing bold climate plans and actions. The first section synthesizes key learnings and recommendations from the case studies. The second section provides detailed case studies of the actions and experiences of the 12 case study cities, which can be referred to for further learnings, additional links and references, and the contact information of representatives from the cities’ climate departments.

---

1 “The Paris Agreement: Essential Elements.” United Nations Climate Change, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

2 “City Action to Address the Climate Emergency.” C40, [www.c40.org/other/city-commitments](http://www.c40.org/other/city-commitments).

The report makes recommendations related to eight key themes.



## 1. EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS TARGETS AND INVENTORIES

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventories and targets lay the foundation for city climate action. GHG emissions targets define the city's level of ambition, while detailed emissions inventories that are broken down by sector, activity, and neighbourhood provide transparency on a city's current state. Together, targets and inventories enable accountability and monitoring of a city's climate action efforts.

All 12 local governments studied had net-zero GHG targets, with 10 aiming for net-zero emissions by 2030. The most progressive cities accounted for the consumption and production of goods and services in their inventories, going above and beyond typical inventory inclusions.

The report recommends that cities:

- Set ambitious net-zero GHG emissions targets as soon as possible.
- Include GHG emissions from consumption and production of goods and services in inventories and in GHG emissions reductions targets.
- Undertake energy and GHG emissions modelling that also captures financial and socioeconomic impacts.



## 2. CARBON BUDGETS AND ANNUAL REPORTING

In order to keep global warming within 1.5°C, cumulative global GHG emissions must be kept within approximately 336 GtCO<sub>2</sub>e as of the beginning of 2020.<sup>3</sup> This number is the global carbon budget. By adopting a community-wide carbon budget that adheres with this global cap, cities can help the planet get on track to limit global warming. The boldest case study cities were those that created carbon budgets alongside their GHG emissions reduction target. This requires those cities to consider carbon emissions when making all decisions. In addition, they must report annually on their GHG emissions and, if required, readjust future years' budgets.

The report recommends that cities:

- Adopt carbon budgets that align with IPCC recommendations for limiting warming to below 1.5°C.
- Monitor and report on progress towards the target and carbon budget on a yearly basis.
- Develop sector-specific targets and carbon budgets.

<sup>3</sup> This amount is based off of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). While the Sixth Assessment Report is anticipated to be released in 2022, new climate models put this number as high as 560 GtCO<sub>2</sub>e, illustrating the need to periodically evaluate and adapt to the latest climate science. See: Riahi, K. et al. The Shared Socioeconomic Pathways and their energy, land use, and greenhouse gas emissions implications: An overview, *Global Environmental Change*, Volume 42, Pages 153-168, 2017, ISSN 0959-3780, DOI:110.1016/j.gloenvcha.2016.05.009



### 3. CLIMATE EMERGENCY DECLARATIONS

Climate emergency declarations are pieces of legislation passed by governing bodies asserting and putting on record their support for taking urgent action on climate change. All of the cities studied had declared a climate emergency. They are among over 1,500 national, sub-national, and local governments that have declared a climate emergency worldwide. These declarations serve as a means to authorise bold action, including setting ambitious climate targets and timelines, developing or upgrading climate action plans, and committing to monitoring and reporting on progress.

The report recommends that cities have council declare a climate emergency, including direction to:

- Adopt GHG emissions targets and carbon budgets that align with IPCC's 1.5°C warming limit;
- Adopt a climate lens to be included in all relevant council decisions and reports;
- Divest city pension funds from fossil fuels;
- Develop or update the city's climate action plan; and
- Support any other actions that are key to advancing the city's climate action.



### 4. CLIMATE ACTION GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Climate action requires resources from city departments, as well as support from Council, residents, local business, and organizations. Among the best practice cities, at least one member of council is assigned climate change action as part of their portfolio. City staff are also key to driving climate action, with most cities noting that they ideally need more staff to get them on track to their targets.

At the same time, Council and staff draw on support from the broader community. All 12 cities studied had climate action task forces. Many of these were public-private partnerships that brought together members of academia, climate advocacy groups, faith-based groups, city agencies, the private sector, and at least one member of council. This approach enabled cities to hit the ground running with partners ready to support and/or implement elements of the cities' climate action plans.

The report recommends that cities:

- Assign at least one member of council to the climate change portfolio.
- Allocate sufficient staff and capital resources for climate action early to jumpstart efforts and achieve benefits and paybacks sooner.
- Establish and empower a climate action task force to develop and deliver the climate

action plan, including membership from academia, climate advocacy groups, city agencies, the private sector, and at least one representative from Council.



## 5. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

Engagement and education are critical to climate action planning. Done well, they can help a city establish implementation partners, ensure uptake of climate action programmes, and create impetus for council approval of climate plans.

Best practice cities invested significant time and effort in raising awareness of the city's role in responding to climate change, as well as engaging citizens in a way that enabled them to shape the city's plan and, in some cases, help with implementing and monitoring it. Cities solicited input from members of the public, community groups, non-profits, businesses, and climate experts through citizens' juries and assemblies, advisory groups, and multi-stakeholder climate action task forces. These initiatives helped create widespread public support for climate action and enabled the cities to develop partnerships to deliver on climate targets.

The report recommends that cities:

- Educate and inform citizens about the importance of climate action efforts, what the city is doing, and how they can help.
- Establish citizens' assemblies or juries composed of residents randomly selected from the public to advise on appropriate actions and targets for the City.
- Be transparent in community climate action planning engagement efforts, for example, by livestreaming citizens' assemblies.
- Establish or work with youth boards and summits to engage young people on city climate action.
- Establish multi-stakeholder task forces, with representation from council, city departments, and a variety of community groups (businesses, academia, environmental groups, etc.), to oversee climate action planning and implementation. Ensure that representatives from marginalised populations are also included in this group and other engagement efforts.
- Develop education and retraining programmes to transition workers to low-carbon industries.



## 6. CLIMATE ACTION NETWORKS

All 12 local governments are members of climate action networks. Participation in these networks helps to accelerate local climate action, filling in gaps where support from higher levels of government or expertise may be lacking. Participating cities benefit by testing new

and innovative GHG emissions reduction approaches, sharing tips for implementation efforts, boosting their local and international profiles, encouraging one another to increase their levels of ambition, and more.

The report recommends that cities:

- Sign on to global commitments on city climate action and participate in climate action networks.
- Seek opportunities to support other cities through sharing and replicating successful practices.



## 7. CLIMATE ACTION IMPLEMENTATION

Many of the most successful actions and plans undertaken by the cities studied are those that jointly address the climate emergency alongside other needs or issues, such as energy poverty, air quality, and health. For example, building retrofit programmes that improve energy efficiency in low-income households can help reduce energy bills and alleviate energy poverty. Similarly, measures to improve transit, as well as walking and cycling infrastructure, can decrease air pollution from cars and improve health. Finally, locally-owned renewable energy systems help cities gain energy independence and create local revenue.

The report recommends that cities:

- Prioritise actions that align with other city priorities, such as health and poverty reduction.
- Develop locally owned renewable energy generation systems and distributions networks.



## 8. CLIMATE ADVOCACY

One of the top challenges noted by the cities studied was the need for support from higher levels of government. Cities said that, to deliver on their emissions reductions goals, they needed more funding from higher levels of government; they wished to see more funding for national emissions reductions strategies and infrastructure, as well as for the cities themselves to deliver tailor-made projects specific to their contexts and needs.

The report recommends that cities:

- Commence work on advocating for national action, collaboration, and funding as early as possible.
- Collaborate with other cities to develop coordinated asks of upper levels of government.
- Adopt a council motion to advocate for climate action at the federal level.



## CONCLUSION

UK cities are leading the way on climate action, setting aggressive targets and calling on higher levels of government to support their on-the-ground efforts to transition to zero-carbon economies. While the 12 case study jurisdictions demonstrated success in climate action, all believed they faced significant challenges with respect to meeting their climate targets. This illustrates that much more work has yet to be done. Through their shared learnings, cities can continue to support and push one another to take bolder action and achieve the level of ambition required to make the Paris Agreement a reality.