

Local authority levers to deliver Net Zero

Local authorities are responsible for 2 – 5% of local emissions but potentially influence around a third of an area's emissions through place-shaping and leadership

Local authorities are directly responsible for between 2- 5% of their local area's emissions. However, local authorities have many levers that can be used to deliver wider local action to reduce emissions and prepare local areas for a changing climate. Key powers and duties are:

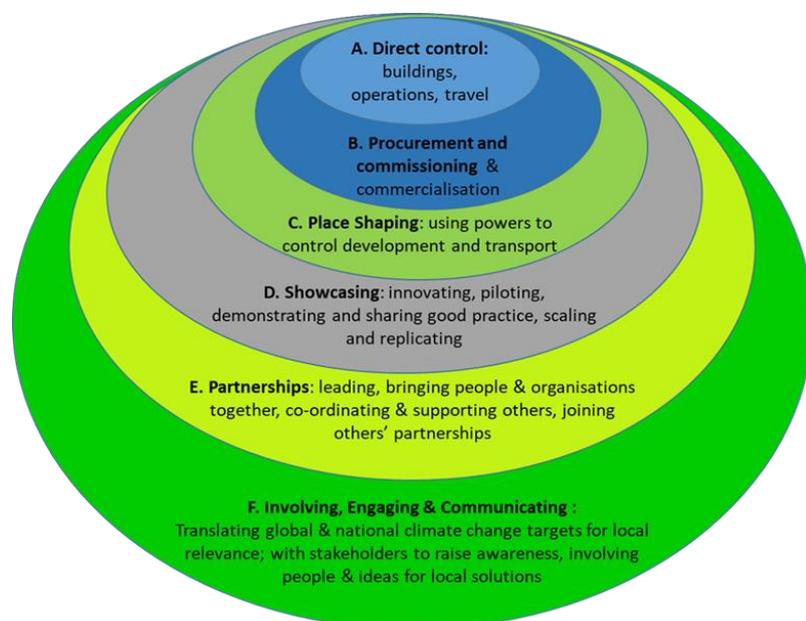
- An overarching role to support the economic, health and social wellbeing of communities
- Planning powers over buildings and transport
- Enforcement of building regulations
- Powers to ensure buildings meet basic energy efficiency standards
- Duties to prevent homelessness and prevent hazards in housing
- Duties to manage risk including climate risks such as flooding
- Duties and powers to protect the environment, wildlife and heritage
- Duties to collect and dispose of waste
- Borrowing and investment powers

Local authorities' leadership role in partnerships and with the public places them at the heart of the climate conversation and in developing and replicating local solutions.

Figure 1.2. shows local authorities' leverage and influence through their services, planning and enforcement roles, housing, regeneration, economic development activities, education and skills services and investments. Their leadership role in partnerships and with the public places them at the heart of the climate conversation and in developing and replicating local solutions.

However, these levers alone are not sufficient to deliver local authorities' Net Zero ambitions, due to gaps in key powers that prevent systems-scale or holistic approaches, policy and funding barriers, and a lack of capacity and skills caused by funding cuts.

Figure 1.2 How local authorities control and influence emissions



Source: 'Onion diagram' based on internal Centre for Sustainability model and amended for this report.

Progress to date in reducing emissions has been largely achieved through centrally driven policy to phase out coal for electricity production. This required a small number of actors supported by local supply chains in specific places.

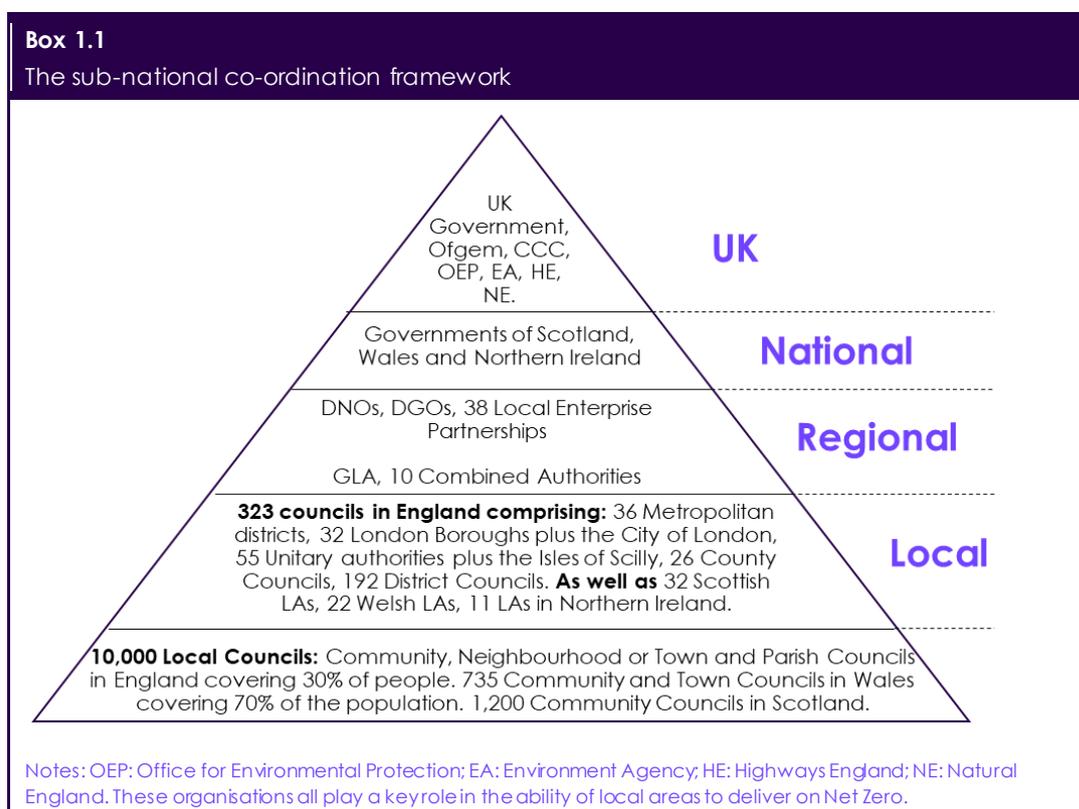
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Many of the urgent changes and decisions which are needed next to reduce emissions and reach Net Zero have a strong local dimension. Decarbonising buildings, transport, waste and industry, cutting emissions from agriculture and storing more carbon through land-use and forestry are dependent on delivery at a local scale. By the early 2030s all new investment and purchase decisions need to be Net Zero. This will require decisive national policy, but the way this is delivered will differ according to local context and a 'one size fits all' approach will not work. This is particularly important to deliver heat decarbonisation, which cannot be achieved in a cost-effective way without coordination for the infrastructure investments needed.

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This is not just about technology, but is about supporting people in taking low-carbon decisions. Public trust in local authority Trading Standards and consumer groups is high at 80% compared to 41% trust in energy suppliers*. This reinforces the crucial role of local authorities as trusted enablers in the energy transition.

Current lack of national co-ordination



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In England and Northern Ireland, there is no overall plan on how local authorities fit into delivering Net Zero. The onus is on local authorities to work out their own course based on piecemeal policy and communications from Government. This particularly affects smaller local authorities with fewer staff working on emissions reductions.

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* BEIS Public Attitudes Tracker June 2020