



Building support for the energy transition inquiry: Call for evidence

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

UK100 Submission

Written by:

Liam Ward

Communications and Engagement Manager

liam.ward@uk100.org

Philip Glanville

Director of Advocacy and Engagement

philip.glanville@uk100.org

Executive Summary

UK100, the UK's only cross-party network of local leaders committed to ambitious climate action, welcomes the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee's inquiry on building support for the energy transition. Our response draws on our extensive work with local authorities across the country, including our pioneering **Local Climate Engagement (LCE)** programme delivered in partnership with **Involve, Climate Outreach**, and other organisations.

Local authorities have a unique leadership role in driving the energy transition and are consistently rated as the most trusted tier of government on climate action. With 82% of UK emissions within the influence scope of local government, their success in building public consent for the transition is vital as highlighted in UK100's Local Net Zero 2.0 report¹, and subsequently referenced in the Climate Change Committee's (CCC) Seventh Carbon Budget report. However, they face significant barriers including misinformation, political polarisation, resource constraints, and delivery challenges.

Our response addresses the Committee's four questions, highlighting how effective public engagement can build understanding and support for the transition, alongside practical examples from our network of over 117 local leaders representing over 60% of the UK population. We would also recommend that the inquiry seeks to influence the Government's upcoming first national public participation strategy in its recommendations².

Introduction to UK100

UK100 is the only network of ambitious local authorities led by all political parties working together to tackle climate change. We help councils overcome challenges and turn innovation into solutions that work everywhere. We build the case for the powers needed to

¹ <https://www.uk100.org/publications/local-net-zero-20-moment-deliver>

² <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/desnz-monthly-newsletter-energygovuk-1j6e/>

make change happen. From cities to villages, we help communities across the UK create thriving places powered by clean energy — with fresh air to breathe, warm homes to live in, and a healthy natural environment.

Question 1: Has the Government properly explained the potential benefits of the energy transition to the average citizen?

The previous and current governments' messaging around the energy transition has failed to effectively communicate its benefits to the average citizen. The Government's most recent British Attitudes Tracker to ask the question, found almost half of Britons are overwhelmed by conflicting climate information and don't know what to trust³.

Our experience working with local authorities demonstrates that effective communication needs to be:

1. **Locally relevant** - Framing benefits in terms of personal and local community impact
2. **Connected to everyday concerns** - Linking climate action to cost of living, jobs, and health
3. **Accessible and consistent** - Using clear, jargon-free language consistently across departments

The role of local authorities

Local authorities are ideally positioned to bridge the communication gap between national policy and local citizens:

Case Study: South Somerset District Council's Parish Environment Champions Network⁴

South Somerset District Council established a Parish Environment Champions Network to share information and accelerate community action on decarbonisation and biodiversity. They created:

- A dedicated South Somerset Environment website separate from the council website for better navigation
- Monthly "Get SuSSed" e-newsletter reaching 114 subscribers
- A network of 70 Parish Environment Champions (more than half of all parishes)

This approach increased awareness of climate initiatives, improved access to grant information, and has been replicated by several other councils. The council found that

³

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65fc5d35a6c0f7001aef9202/DESNZ_Public_Atitudes_Tracker_Winter_2023_Net_Zero_and_Climate_Change_Revised.pdf

⁴

<https://www.uk100.org/projects/knowledgehub/south-somerset-district-council-engaging-local-communities-climate-action>

"people are more likely to engage with climate action if the website is easier to use" and they are less distracted by other council matters.

Local communication initiatives like this demonstrate how councils can effectively explain the benefits of climate action when properly resourced and supported.

Question 2: Is there a clear understanding of the costs of the energy transition to householders and businesses?

There is insufficient understanding of both the costs and benefits of the energy transition among householders and businesses. Our work with local authorities reveals three key issues:

1. **Cost transparency gaps** - While immediate costs are often highlighted, long-term savings and co-benefits are understated
2. **Fairness concerns** - Insufficient attention to how costs and benefits will be distributed across society
3. **Support mechanisms** - Lack of clarity about available support for transition costs

Local authorities are well-positioned to address these issues through targeted engagement:

Case Study: Derbyshire County Council's Retrofit Engagement⁵

As part of our Local Climate Engagement programme, Derbyshire County Council consulted residents about retrofit (improving energy efficiency) of owner-occupied properties through:

- Online consultations
- Face-to-face and online meetings with community groups
- One-to-one meetings with interested individuals
- Pop-up street surveys

This engagement provided valuable data for an action plan and helped develop a shared language around energy efficiency. The collaborative nature of the project "brought different perspectives, 'joined dots' that they might not otherwise have, and helped them develop a shared language." This has led to new initiatives, including a consortium bid for funding related to energy use.

⁵ <https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/docuemnt/LCE%20Part%201%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf>

Question 3: Is there a need for public campaigns to counter the anti net zero narrative?

There is an urgent need for coordinated public campaigns to counter misinformation and build positive support for the net zero transition. Nearly 50% of UK100 members have faced abuse and disruptions from campaigns spreading conspiracy theories and misinformation about local climate initiatives. The challenges faced by our members have been vividly brought to the fore by our work through our Local Power in Action Programme in Somerset, one of the outcomes of which has been a new Mythbusting Energy Factsheet⁶, to empower officers and members alike when talking about and making decisions on renewable energy.

However, rather than simply countering negative narratives, we advocate for proactive, positive engagement that:

1. **Builds literacy** - Improves public understanding of climate science and solutions
2. **Promotes dialogue** - Creates space for meaningful discussion about trade-offs and benefits
3. **Develops resilience** - Equips communities to identify and respond to misinformation

Case Study: Camden Citizens' Assembly on the climate crisis⁷

Camden Council arranged a Citizens' Assembly to build consensus on addressing the climate crisis. Over three meetings and 12 hours, 50 demographically representative residents:

- Heard evidence about the climate crisis and potential solutions
- Generated 613 ideas, shortlisting 213 of them
- Agreed on 17 actions for residents, community groups, businesses and the Council

The assembly demonstrated excellence by "empowering a diverse and demographically reflective group of residents, with input from the rest of the community, to contribute in the formulation of a plan to tackle the climate crisis." 90% of participants attended all three sessions, and 76% wanted to continue being involved in developing and delivering actions.

This approach demonstrates how to move beyond countering negative narratives to building positive consensus.

Question 4: How should the Government be more positively engaging the public with this goal?

Based on our experience working with over 100 local authorities, we recommend the following government actions to improve public engagement:

⁶ <https://www.uk100.org/projects/knowledgehub/somerset-councils-mythbusting-energy-factsheet>

⁷ <https://www.uk100.org/projects/knowledgehub/camden-citizens-assembly-climate-crisis>

1. Support localised engagement

Recommendation: Ensure Britain's first-ever public participation strategy on net zero includes meaningful local authority input and dedicated funding for local engagement initiatives.

Case Study: Local Climate Engagement programme outcomes

Our Local Climate Engagement programme evaluation demonstrated significant positive outcomes:

- Five local authorities implemented public engagement activities that were "more interactive, accessible, and locally focused" than they would have been without support
- 11 out of 15 local authorities made changes to their public engagement processes and plans
- The programme gave momentum to wider climate action

The evaluation highlighted that "local authorities have a real interest in learning about better public engagement in climate decision-making" and there is "potential for significant change in this area" when properly supported.

2. Embrace deliberative approaches

Recommendation: Fund and support deliberative democracy initiatives like citizens' assemblies, ensuring diverse participation and meaningful influence on policy.

Case Study: Southampton's Citizens' Climate Assembly⁸

Southampton City Council ran a citizens' assembly on climate change and transport in partnership with academic institutions and Involve. Through a robust process, 37 demographically representative residents:

- Participated in five days of learning, deliberation, and decision-making
- Created a vision statement, ten priority recommendations, and funding ideas
- Directly informed the council's Local Transport Plan

The assembly was rigorously designed, including civil society events to shape the assembly's remit and ensure local relevance. Assembly members all rated their experience as good or excellent, agreeing the assembly represented the city's diversity and allowed them to express their views safely.

⁸ <https://www.uk100.org/projects/knowledgehub/southamptons-citizens-climate-assembly>

3. Build capacity and time for effective engagement

Recommendation: Establish a national framework for climate engagement with toolkits (take for example, UK100's public Inclusive Climate Engagement toolkit⁹), training, and peer learning opportunities for local authorities.

Our Local Climate Engagement programme evaluation found that capacity building for local authorities is most effective when it includes:

- Clear focus for change requiring public input
- Senior buy-in to model good practice
- Sufficient capacity and budget for implementation
- Long-term plans for embedding learning

4. Coordinate messaging across government

Recommendation: Develop consistent, accessible messaging on the energy transition across all government departments and communications.

Our work with local authorities shows that inconsistent messaging creates confusion and undermines trust. A whole-of-government approach is needed to ensure clear, consistent communication about the benefits, costs, and pathways of the transition. This could also include a national energy advice service for England, matching similar and effective services in the devolved nations and examples in Europe, including France.

Conclusion

Local authorities are at the forefront of building public support for the energy transition, but they need proper resourcing, support, and policy frameworks from national government to maximise their impact. Effective public engagement — whether through citizens' assemblies, community networks, or targeted consultations — is essential for building the understanding and consensus needed to achieve our clean energy and climate goals.

We welcome the Committee's inquiry and would be pleased to facilitate oral evidence from local authority leaders within our network who are pioneering innovative approaches to energy transition engagement. We can also facilitate visits or more informal conversations with our members and partners.

This submission is from UK100.

UK100 is the only network of ambitious local authorities led by all political parties working together to tackle climate change. We help councils overcome challenges and turn innovation into solutions that work everywhere.

⁹ <https://www.uk100.org/publications/inclusive-climate-action-toolkit-effective-public-engagement-decision-making>



We build the case for the powers needed to make change happen. From cities to villages, we help communities across the UK create thriving places powered by clean energy — with fresh air to breathe, warm homes to live in, and a healthy natural environment.