

4 APRIL 2022

PR 3-22 | LORDS INQUIRY INTO MOBILISING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT: BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the nationally recognised membership and support organisation representing the interests of around 10,000 parish and town councils and many parish meetings in England, 70% of which are situated in rural areas. Local (parish and town) councils are the backbone of our democracy and closest to local people, providing our neighbourhoods, villages, towns and small cities with a democratic voice and structure for action, contributing in excess of £2 billion of community investment to supporting and improving local communities and delivering neighbourhood level services.

Summary

- NALC is submitting this response independently but on behalf of its circa 10,000 member councils.
- Albeit at a very late stage, NALC in principle welcomes the House of Lords getting in touch on behalf of its Environment and Climate Change Committee to invite NALC to submit written evidence for the Committee's inquiry into behaviour change to meet the UK government's environment and climate goals.
- Whilst the committee has doubtless engaged with a number of overseas and non-local government agencies regarding this inquiry, it strikes us that local government at all levels within the UK has a hugely powerful and vital role to play in mobilising action climate change and stimulating behaviour change on the environment. For this reason we (NALC) are surprised given that this inquiry initially concluded on 13 December 2021 that we were not consulted sooner.
- We feel that the committee focussed / is focussing on the most urgent public policy areas where local government bodies can arguably influence and change behaviour in fighting and mobilising action on climate change (mitigation and adaptation) and the environment (e.g. biodiversity, water, waste and the circular economy and air pollution. Please see [here](#) the sheer array of projects local councils are delivering to combat climate change.
- However it is also right that the committee is / was interested in the wider conditions needed for people to make changes and the sequencing of related policy measures as climate change is a global issue requiring

grassroots solutions which local (parish and town) councils are ideally placed to help deliver.

NALC's responses to the main inquiry questions are as below:

Question 1: What have been your local authority's most successful initiatives to enable behaviour change? What made these examples so effective, and how did you evidence behaviour change'?

NALC corporately declared a climate emergency in 2019, adopted a climate change policy (since when an estimated 37% of councils have declared a climate emergency), and is keenly promoting behavioural change in respect of climate change. NALC is always ready and willing to respond to parliamentary calls for evidence and to governmental consultations on matters which relate to us - ideally with sufficient lead in and response time.

It was unclear from the brief information sent by the committee to NALC whether evidence was primarily being sought about how local authorities or local (parish and town) councils have or should change their own behaviour, or how principal authorities and local councils can promote behavioural change in the wider population. Currently we believe that local councils' best role in fighting climate change is as leaders and facilitators of behavioural change by and within local communities and neighbourhoods. As the conclusion to the 2021 NALC report *What can local councils do on climate change?* shows - there is an identifiable trend between councils who have declared climate change emergencies and the likelihood to take positive action against climate change, such as sustainable neighbourhood plans, establishing working groups or using the General Power of Competence in climate policy.

Question 2: What challenges does the local authority face in its efforts to enable behaviour change?

In its above mentioned report *What can local councils do on climate change?* NALC discovered that a large proportion (92%) of reporting councils have not completed carbon footprint calculations. These calculations are useful in identifying efficient measures that councils and their communities can take to offset their footprint. The overwhelming barrier to overcome is that many councils believe they are simply too small to effect change as they lack finance, expertise, and the power to influence. Finance emerges as a key variable, when considering that councils with a higher annual budget reported higher levels of climate and/or biodiversity declaration (74% of local councils with annual budgets over £250,000 have declared climate emergencies). Furthermore, councils have asked

for support to: apply for grants/subsidies, raise funds, improve expertise and boost outreach.

Question 3: What should be the respective roles of different actors in delivering behaviour change, including government, local authorities, businesses, civil society including community groups, and individuals and households?

Local councils are doing their best corporately to make an impact on climate change but it tends to be the larger local councils with bigger budgets and staff resources which can more directly impact climate change. All local councils in general can best impact this agenda by - organising and implementing initiatives such as tree-planting, recycling, car-sharing schemes and energy-generation; facilitating action by other groups and volunteers in the community; promoting an understanding and good-practice via local newsletters and social media and working in partnership to help deliver the programmes of other agencies and authorities.

NALC's recommendations in the above cited report reinforce this trend. Local councils should:

- Continue to declare climate and/or biodiversity declarations where possible as this leads to a higher level of climate action e.g. climate working groups, and sustainable neighbourhood plans.
- Conduct carbon footprint calculations at the community and individual level with resources provided by NALC.
- Utilise carbon footprint calculations to identify where councils can make changes to reduce carbon emissions within the community or their own operations.
- Councils should aim to set up climate working groups to forge connections with other councils, principal authorities and climate action groups to share best practice and lobby MPs.

Question 4: What are your recommendations for the UK Government in how it should approach behaviour change, including in how it works with local authorities on this endeavour?

DEFRA and wider government should:

- Work with NALC to provide resources for councils to conduct their own carbon footprint calculations.

Provide local councils with direct funding to combat climate change, help them overcome their barriers to climate action such as direct access to funding/grants; with increased powers to act under the General Power of Competence, accountability measures and tools, and incentives for green initiatives.

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