

# Accelerating Progress to Local Area Energy Planning in UK Local Government

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**Abstract:** In an era of growing climate vulnerability, the impacts of climate change are increasingly being felt within cities and local communities. Local and regional actors have a key part to play in adaptation and mitigation – for example, the UK government estimates that up to 82% of the country’s emissions can be influenced by local authorities. However, the ability of local government to enact this influence and support community resilience to climate impacts is severely hampered by their increasingly precarious financial position and a lack of formal responsibilities and associated resources to engage with local stakeholders.

This paper examines the role of local government in accelerating the transition to net zero in the UK. We present the results of a risk analysis of 13 Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) documents from 7 separate local authorities in the UK, as well as a mapping of practical implications from 6 “trailblazer” local authorities in England and the actions they are taking to deliver projects identified under their LAEPs.

This research highlights challenges with the national policy framework’s approach of considering local authorities as key change agents in the net zero space. We examine the tensions between the technical potentials of Local Area Energy Planning and the socio-technical system of local authority governance, including political, financial and social factors. We find that to be effective change agents, the lack of devolved powers to enact legislation or regulate is not the key constraint; rather, they are challenged in terms of their capacity to develop and implement technical projects, convene networks of diverse stakeholders for place-based approaches, and drive change at an accelerated pace locally.

Finally, we recommended enhanced governance approaches to reduce non-technical barriers to implementation, and consider the needs of diverse stakeholders for equitable, inclusive climate action.

**Keywords:** net zero, United Kingdom, local area energy planning, local government, resilience

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## **Main highlights:**

- Local authorities are expected to take key roles in net zero and resilience
- Local authorities lack capacity (human, institutional and financial)
- The national policy framework for net zero is underdeveloped
- There are multiple unaddressed risks to implementing net zero projects
- LAEP is a useful methodology, but moving to implementation and delivery is challenging