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Win an ambitious Climate Action Plan for councils

We urgently need councils to turn their climate emergency declarations into concrete action by adopting and implementing a Climate Action Plan. That's why we've created this guide to help you campaign for an ambitious Climate Action Plan in your area.

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Introduction

Climate Action Plan for councils

Councils up and down the country have declared a climate emergency and many have now adopted Climate Action Plans, thanks to the tireless campaigning of local action groups. These plans must now lead to real action. We need councils to lead the way where the national government continues to fail. And we need you to help them do it.

As more and more communities take climate action across the UK, pressure will mount on the national government to do the same – so let's get to it.

About this guide

This guide will help you identify the best way to run your campaign. Feel free to adapt it if you'd like to – each community has different priorities, so no two campaigns will be the same.

As always, you can seek support for your campaign from the [resource hub](#), and your Friends of the Earth staff contact.

You don't need to be an expert on local government to campaign for a Climate Action Plan – you just need enthusiasm, commitment and a bit of hard work. And you'll naturally pick things up and develop your campaign skills as you go.

We're keen to share your successes and learnings with other activists across the country, so please do let us know when something of note happens... whether it's a picture of your first meeting with a councillor, a public meeting you've organised or if you've actually won your Plan, it will help inspire others to push for ambitious climate action from their councils too.

We've broken this guide down into three key stages:

1. Getting the campaign started for a Climate Action Plan;
2. Campaigning for an ambitious Plan and winning over your council;
3. How to tell if your council's Plan is any good.

1. Recruit and build a local action group

Campaigning is best done in a team, so you'll need a group of people working together to have the best chance of winning.

If you aren't already a local action group, why not [become one or form a group](#)?

Local action groups are part of a large network supported by training, resources and seasoned activists with plenty of expertise and lobbying power.

Get to know your group

Your group may start small and then (hopefully) grow, but whatever the size, make the time to get to know one another.

It might be useful to have a discussion about how you want to work together. We want to create spaces where everyone feels empowered to lead and where everyone feels comfortable bringing 100% of themselves to the group.

Here's a few things you might want to think about:

- How often do you want to meet and where? It's usually good to meet somewhere which has public transport links. Does anyone have a laptop to help people dial in to meetings via Skype or Zoom?
- Are there any access needs in the group or requirements that will help people participate more fully? Is your meeting place wheelchair-accessible? If you've got a long meeting or activity, are you building in enough breaks?
- Does anyone have caring responsibilities and if so, what would help those group members participate? You might for example adjust meeting times or meeting days to accommodate commitments.
- Spend some time talking about the culture your group wants to create – how will you ensure all voices are heard and that everyone feels able to contribute?
- Make space to let group members share what they are passionate about in relation to climate breakdown. You might find out some really interesting things about people in your group!
- Discuss what skills people can bring to the campaign and the group. There may be secret marketers or lobbyists in your midst.

Start building a powerful diverse coalition for action

As the climate emergency rockets up the public agenda, more and more people are getting involved in the fight to save our planet. So make sure you reach out to other active groups in your area and work together on the campaign for an ambitious [Climate Action Plan \(PDF\)](#).

The more of a diverse range of voices you have in your campaign, the more likely it is that the Climate Action Plan will be delivered with, and for, your whole community.

There are some groups in your local area who are more likely to experience the impacts of the climate and ecological crises first hand. For example people of colour are less likely to have access to good quality green space, and are disproportionately exposed to high levels of air pollution, despite being less likely to own a car. While people on lower incomes are more likely to experience fuel poverty. So it's important that you work with groups and organisations that represent those who have done the least to cause climate breakdown but are the most affected by its impacts. These could include youth climate strikers, fuel poverty action groups, trade unions and anti-racist campaign groups.

Use one of your first meetings to map out how you might expand your group and reach out to trade unions, different faith groups, students and other types of community groups throughout your campaign. To make the big changes we need to stop climate breakdown, we'll need to reach out to the full diversity of our communities. As Greta Thunberg says: "to change everything, we need everyone."

Try this [quick community mapping exercise](#) that may help you map out potential allies.

Once you've decided who you want to reach out to, get in touch with them and ask them for a face-to-face meeting. During the meeting you can establish shared values, understand each other's aims and where you're coming from, and identify how you can work together.

2. Get to know your local area

Learn how your councils works

Approaching your council for the first time can be confusing. But you don't need to be an expert to work with your council – often it's simply knowing the right person to contact.

Councils operate in slightly different ways depending on where you live. We've produced a [guide to help you understand how the council works in your local area](#).

Understanding the Climate Action Plan for councils

It might sound obvious but it's really useful to set aside a good bit of time for the group to read through the [Climate Action Plan \(PDF\)](#) together. This is a great opportunity for everyone to:

- Understand its key points across the ten areas.
- Discuss any elements of it which are unclear. We've got an [explainer guide](#) for each of the ten areas to help break things down.

If everyone is confident in their understanding of the Climate Action Plan and what it contains, you'll have a much better chance of convincing others of its merits and getting an ambitious one implemented.

We understand it can take councils time to tackle climate breakdown, so we've teamed up with sustainable energy charity [Ashden](#) to help you prioritise.

We've analysed some of the actions from the Climate Action Plan, and identified those which will have most impact in terms of carbon savings, affordability and benefits such as job creation and growing the economy. Find out more about the [top Climate Actions for councils](#).

Use our tool to get localised stats on your area

Friends of the Earth has crunched a lot of data and created [an easy online tool](#) to provide a snapshot of how well your area is doing on things like housing, transport, energy, trees and waste. It also compares local authority areas with other similar local authority areas, so it takes into account the location, geography and size of the council.

The tool is particularly helpful as it sets some clear targets for each council to reach which will be useful in your campaign. Of course the council alone can't deliver all the change needed – we need the UK government to play a far bigger role – but it's a great benchmark.

Find out what the council are already doing to tackle climate breakdown

Some councils have already adopted a Climate Action Plan and are working on implementing it, and some councils are lagging behind.

Use this [Climate Emergency database](#) to find out if your council already has a Plan and how it compares to other councils.

If your council already has a Plan – great! You can focus your campaign on making sure their Plan is as ambitious and robust as possible.

If your council doesn't have a Plan, you'll want to focus your campaign on getting them to adopt one.

In this case, you may find it's a bit harder to find out how your council is doing on the 50 points of the [Climate Action Plan](#), as it might be a bit less forthcoming with information. But sometimes it's just about knowing where to look.

Tips for finding out how your council is doing on climate action

- Have a quick search for other key plans and policies which may correlate with sections of the Climate Action Plan (such as public transport, home insulation plans and renewable energy). The plans and policies your council produces will depend on which kind of council you have (eg county, district or metropolitan) and what its duties are.
- Don't spend hours trawling through the council's website. A call to the council could save you time. Start with the switchboard and ask them who the best person to speak to about climate change or environment is.
- Use your connections. Ask around the members of your local action group, personal relationships and other local allies to see if anyone has an existing contact at the council, or knows someone that knows someone. This may give you a way in even if they don't work on climate-related issues.

Is the council running any community consultation events on climate change?

The council might also be running a consultation event on climate change – they may also call it a "citizens' assembly on climate". These are great opportunities to talk about adopting a Climate Action Plan with the council and other residents in the area. You may also make some useful contacts and new people may want to join the local action group too.

You'll usually find a list of upcoming events run by the council on their website and on their social media.

Are there any friendly councillors you can speak to about your campaign?

Councillors are local elected representatives and many will take the time to talk with local campaigners about the issues they care about. You may want to see if there are any councillors who have a track record of speaking up on climate change. You may also be able to work out who put forward a climate emergency motion and reach out to them. You can usually find this information on the council website.

3. Campaign for an ambitious Plan

Once you've done all your preparation – you're more than ready to make a first approach to the council about the Plan.

Request a meeting with the elected leaders of the Council

Who should you request a meeting with? Councils are led by elected councillors and the political group with the largest number of councillors usually has the most say. Some of these councillors will take on additional responsibilities, such as health and social care, and will play a leading role in decision-making around those topics. There may be a councillor who has special responsibility for climate change or the environment – they are usually the best person to approach for a meeting. However, if you are struggling to find out who that person is, it's usually a safe bet to **request a meeting with the leader or mayor of the council**. Even if they can't meet you, they're very likely to direct you to the most appropriate councillor.

You might also be able to find information about councillors who are potential allies by finding out who put the climate emergency motion forward, or the lead department working on creating an action plan. So you could prioritise seeking a meeting with them to find out what the council's done so far.

Template email to request a meeting with the council on climate change

You can use our [template email](#) to request a meeting with your council. Remember to send a follow-up email if you haven't heard back after a week. Councillors can get busy but they have a responsibility to reply to people in the area. You may also want to tweet the councillors to say you've contacted them about a meeting on the Plan.

Your meeting with the council

Once you've been given a meeting, it's important to determine what you want out of it. We suggest at the first meeting it's important to talk through why the Climate Action Plan is a strong framework for action that the council and community can use together. If the council already has a Plan you may want to talk about which areas should be a priority for the council.

You might also want to send [a copy of the factsheet](#) in advance for extra information.

The meeting will likely take less than an hour, so keep it focused by drafting an agenda. We've written a [suggested agenda](#) you can use as a template.

If the meeting goes well – that's brilliant! However if the meeting doesn't quite go how you expected. We can then help you move the situation forward.

Build public support for an ambitious Climate Action Plan

Once you've opened up dialogue with the council on the Climate Action Plan, you'll need to keep up the public profile of your campaign. This is important to:

1. Build support for a strong and ambitious Climate Action Plan across the community. There will be many people, groups and local businesses who will love to say they support what you're

- trying to do. They may attend events, sign petitions and share things on social media.
2. Strengthen your local action group by getting more people involved in it. Many hands make light work!

Doing both of these will increase the likelihood of getting a bold Climate Action Plan adopted and implemented by the council.

Campaign tactics

- **Create a petition** for the local area using our excellent [Action Network tool](#). This can be a great way to show support for a strong Climate Action Plan. The petition could also be delivered to the council at a council meeting, or used as a photo opportunity for social media.
- **Join in national moments of unity.** There will be days when the climate movement across the UK will raise its voice loudly together for climate action. Look out for information and opportunities on how your group can participate.
- **Work with local media** and ask them to cover different moments in your campaign for an ambitious Climate Action Plan. Identify key moments which may interest local journalists, and propose articles or radio interviews.
- **Engage in any consultation events**, such as citizens' assemblies. Bring copies of the Climate Action Plan for councils and speak with others about it.
- **Organise a public meeting** to discuss the climate solutions in the Climate Action Plan. Perhaps it could be focused on a key issue in your community, such as transport or housing. You could invite a representative of the council to speak too.
- **Do a creative stunt** outside the council offices that you can get a great picture of and use for the campaign.
- **Keep it fun and engaging** to help keep morale high. Think about organising a fun social event to strengthen the connections in your group. It's important to celebrate even the small successes to help keep up momentum.
- **[Carry on reaching out and welcoming new people and potential allies.](#)** Ensure that new people are welcomed and that the group creates space and new roles so that everyone can contribute to the campaign.
- Keep up the **face-to-face contact with councillors** and council staff. Build a strong working relationship and be honest about how you think things are going.
- Make the link between the **local and global** impacts of climate change. You could even organise a film screening or event about the impacts of climate change globally. If your area is at increased risk of flooding, there might be an opportunity to discuss with people facing flooding in other countries.

Remember we can provide lots of [resources and training](#) to help you deliver these tactics. Please also share any great ideas you come up with so they can inspire others.

4. Is your council's Plan any good?

If your council already has a Plan, you'll be able to find a copy of it in the [Climate Emergency database](#).

So how do you know if it's good enough? You can use the [template Climate Action Plan for councils](#) to check against the content of your own councils plan. Some key things to look out for to know if your council has a strong and ambitious plan are:

- Your council's Climate Action Plan is led by a senior lead council officer and there is a cabinet member responsible for the plan.
- The plan is developed in consultation with a representative cross section of the community.
- The plan is presented in a clear and accessible way.
- Progress on climate action must be measurable by emissions targets set for the area.
- Social justice sits at the heart of the Climate Action Plan. Climate impacts do not and will not affect all the community equally. It is critical that plans are designed to increase social equity, address environmental injustice, and support those most vulnerable in the community.
- Education, skills and training should be key components of the plan.
- Your council should commit to include the climate emergency in all decisions and actions
- The plan must identify how actions will be funded and include target dates for these actions.

If you'd like to delve a bit deeper into what makes a strong Climate Action Plan, you may also want to use the [Climate Emergency checklist tool](#) created with help from Friends of the Earth. The checklist is divided into sections based on key areas that need to be considered when developing Climate Action Plan.

Sharing successes and learnings on your campaign

What does a campaign "win" look like?

It's unlikely that any council will give a straightforward "yes" to everything you want them to do. However, we want councils to commit to doing as many things as they reasonably can, and your local action group will be the best judge of what's "reasonable".

We're always keen to hear stories of success from your campaign. Have you been able to win a Climate Action Plan for your area? Have you got the council to up its game on big issues like transport or commit to measures like doubling tree cover? We want to show that communities have campaigned for bold action locally and that councils have committed to things they otherwise wouldn't have done.

We want to demonstrate that there is clear appetite from people across the country for bold action. We'll also be able to show that a large number of councils want more action from the UK government on climate change, as well as more funding and powers to go further and faster.

Share your learnings

We're really keen to know what's working well, what hasn't worked well and what you'd do differently throughout the life of your campaign. All of that information is invaluable and will help strengthen and improve the campaigns of your fellow local action groups. Your feedback and insight will also help shape the development of the campaign and inform its next steps.

Together we can boost the impact of every local win. We can look to each other for inspiration. We can find strength in numbers to push for big national change.

Get in touch with us community@foe.co.uk