



**Don't wait to be asked!**

## **An appeal to local authorities and trade unions**

### **1. Background**

The Greener Jobs Alliance is calling for comprehensive plans in every local authority to address the climate and cost of living crises in the UK. Households and businesses are facing massive increases in their energy bills.

Even though most authorities have declared climate emergencies very few have consulted their recognised unions or local community-based unions. This view has been confirmed by surveys in different regions and countries in the UK. In London and Yorkshire these were carried out by the regional TUCs. In Scotland the survey was circulated by Unite.

The GJA recognises the constraints on local and regional authorities imposed by the failure of national government policy and financing. Despite this the main conclusion from this research is that both local authorities and unions should be proactive on an issue that has major implications for jobs and skills in the UK. That's why we are saying '*Don't wait to be asked.*'

### **2. Main findings**

#### **The survey**

This consisted of 21 questions circulated to local authority leaders and climate leads. In **Yorks and Humberside** the survey was circulated prior to the local authority elections in May, 2022. In **London** and **Scotland** it was circulated between July-August, 2022. In **Wales** the TUC has postponed the survey until next year but information about the policy state of play is covered below.

Despite the low response rate there is evidence that some consultation is taking place in other councils that did not complete the survey. This research should be the start of a more comprehensive analysis, particularly identifying examples of good practice.

A copy of the survey can be found at Appendix 1.

#### **Yorkshire and Humberside Region**

This region has led the way in England in trying to establish a union voice on just transition. The TUC was instrumental in getting the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission established in 2021 and co-chairs the Future Economy panel. [Yorkshire & Humberside Climate Commission | \(yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk\)](https://yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk)

**Responses** - Only 6 out of 22 authorities responded to the survey which is a response rate of 27%.

**Climate policy** – All 6 had a climate policy.

**Consultation** - Of these only 3 had consulted with trade unions on their climate emergency plans. An overall engagement rate of 14%.

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Rotherham MBC reported that:

*'During the development of the council's declaration of a Climate Emergency in Rotherham the Unite, GMB and Unison Trade Unions were consulted and nominated a member of the Unison Trade Union to form part of an officer working group which was to support future development of policy, annual reporting and ongoing progress against the councils Climate Action Plan. The Unison representative is invited to a monthly meeting, preceding all meetings an agenda is prepared and minutes are distributed to all delegates including those tendering apologies.'*

**Facility time** – 5 out of the 6 authorities recognised the right of unions to have facility time and training to engage on climate-related issues. In the other authority while the answer was no it was *'because this is not something that is specifically mentioned in the TU Facilities Time Agreement currently but can be considered when this is next reviewed. In the meantime, it is likely this would be looked on favourably given the importance of the climate change agenda.'*

**Skills** – Only 1 out of the 6 referenced the link between skills strategy and climate aims. This will be finalised in October 2022 in consultation with the unions, when *'the 10-year skills strategy goes beyond our organisation and incorporates the green skills and training needs for the city to meet its net zero ambition.'*

**Procurement policies** – Only 1 out of 6 referenced the link between procurement and climate policies, and the unions had been consulted.

**Supply chains** – Only 2 out of 6 linked the sustainability strategy to supply chain emissions

**In-house services** – 4 out of 6 identified a range of services, including retrofit.

Leeds City Council

*'We'd also welcome ideas from the trade unions about how they work with other businesses and employers on this agenda. LCC has plans about how it can reduce its direct impact, but we need to influence an even bigger change in the city as a whole - regarding private housing, industry, transport, land use, bio-diversity, consumption etc. Maybe this survey might catalyse ideas and information exchange.'*

**Barriers** – 5 out of 6 identified significant barriers to bringing more decarbonisation services in-house. Skills, finance, and capacity were the most common issues. *'This depends on the detail of delivery in-house but the main barrier is capacity. Consideration would need to be given to budgets, structures, skills and experience of staff and ways of working'*. Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council.

## London Region

This region consists of 33 councils and a combined authority – the Greater London Authority. The TUC has one representative on the London Recovery Board.

**Responses** – Only 4 out of 34 authorities responded to the survey (12%)

**Climate policy** – All 4 had a climate policy

**Consultation** – Of these only 1 had consulted with trade unions.

**Facility time** – 3 out of 4 recognised the right of unions to have facility time and training to engage on climate-related issues

**Skills** – 3 out of 4 referenced the link between skills strategy and climate aims but none had consulted the unions on these strategies.

**Procurement policies** – Only 1 out of 6 referenced the link between procurement and climate policies and no consultation with unions had taken place.

**Supply chains** - – 3 out of 4 linked the sustainability strategy to supply chain emissions.

**In house services** – Only 1 provided any details - *‘Transport infrastructure upgrades e.g. bus shelters, cycling infrastructure, EV charging; Decarbonising the Council’s Estate and fleet’* (LB Merton)

**Barriers** – 2 authorities identified barriers

**LB Lambeth**

*‘Finance - austerity has had an enormous impact on council budgets and this has been further exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis and inflationary period we are in.’*

**Scotland**

Scotland is the only country in the UK to have an independent Just Transition Commission. There are 3 trade union members from Unite, Prospect, and the RMT represented among the 15 members of the Commission. In the 2022 report one of the Commission’s recommendations was: *Stakeholder analysis should be conducted to identify, categorise, and tailor engagement with different publics and stakeholders around each of the Just Transition Outcomes, to consider interest, influence and impact and ensure both key players and hard-to-reach groups are identified effectively. Use the information from the analysis to develop an engagement and impact strategy.* [Making the Future : Initial Report of the 2nd Just Transition Commission \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/making-the-future/initial-report-of-the-2nd-just-transition-commission/pages/100_to_109.aspx) (July, 2022)

Unite Scotland contacted 32 council leaders in July 2022 with a version of the TUC survey.

**Responses** – Only 3 out of 32 authorities responded to the survey (9%)

**Climate policy** - All 3 councils had a climate or decarbonisation policy.

**Consultation** – Of these only 1 had consulted with trade unions and another had plans to.

**West Lothian Council**

Trade Unions are represented on the Policy Development Scrutiny Panel which assisted with development and scrutiny of the strategy prior to approval.

The strategy and related processes to deliver the outcomes are required to be kept under review and quarterly reports are presented to the Policy Development Scrutiny Panel. The council is also currently consulting on its priorities for the coming years which includes its response to climate change. There have been union briefings on the consultation

**Facility time** – All 3 recognised the right of unions to have facility time and training to engage on climate-related issues

**Skills** – 1 out of 3 referenced the link between skills strategy and climate aims and had consulted the unions on these strategies.

**Procurement policies** – All 3 referenced the link between procurement and climate policies although no consultation with unions had taken place.

**Supply chains** - – All 3 linked the sustainability strategy to supply chain emissions.

**In house services** – All 3 had provision for aspects of energy and transport provision,

**Barriers** – 2 authorities identified barriers to bringing in more services in-house.

## Wales

The Welsh Government's Net Zero plan states that the Welsh government's ambition is for the public sector to be collectively net zero by 2030. It was updated in autumn 2021.

The plan requires public bodies to establish how they will play their full part in making in meeting the goals.

It states that public sector organisations must lead the way towards a net zero future by:

- working with supply chain partners
- being more efficient in the use public sector buildings and locations
- Designing and delivering all services around the users of those services focusing on the lowest carbon options
- Adopting best practice in the transport sector, promoting active travel
- Committing to a rapid shift toward zero emission technologies in vehicles

Specifically, the national net zero plan required that all public sector organisations should to develop and publish plans by March 2023 to achieve a collective net zero public sector by 2030.

According to senior local government trade union officers in Wales, employers have not engaged with trade unions yet in forming their net zero plans. At a recent meeting of the Joint Council for Wales, which brings together trade unions, HR directors and cabinet members for workforce from across the country, **it was agreed that local councils would commit to engage with trade unions on their net zero plans, with a particular focus on a just transition.**

### 3. Summary

The survey underlined the lack of engagement across a range of local authorities in the UK. The overall picture was:

**Responses** – 88 local authorities were sent the survey and 13 responded. (15%)

**Climate policy** – All 13 that responded had a climate policy (100%)

**Consultation on policy** – Of these only 6 had consulted with trade unions. (46%)

**Union Facility time** – 11 considered climate issues to be covered by facility time and training (85%)

**Skills policy linked to climate** – 5 linked their skills policy to climate policy (38%)

**Consultation on skills** – 2 consulted unions on the skills policy (15%)

**Procurement policy linked to climate** – 5 linked their procurement policy to climate (38%)

**Consultation on procurement** – Only 1 had consulted on their procurement policy (8%)

**Supply chain policy** – 8 linked supply chain policy to climate (62%)

**In-house provision** – 10 had in house provision for some climate-related services (77%)

**Barriers** – 9 identified one or more barrier to increasing in-house provision (69%)

### **The response rates**

Overall, there was a low return on the survey. Some of this could be explained by one of the barriers identified – a lack of capacity within local authorities. We tried to make the survey as user friendly as possible but even local authorities that have developed policies around the climate emergency did not reply. The response rate could have been improved by follow-up contact but there was insufficient resource to do this.

Any future surveys could also benefit from a longer completion time and selecting a period not immediately following local elections when new administrations were bedding in.

Even so a 15% response rate on such a key element of local authority strategy is disappointing.

### **Union engagement**

Less than half the councils had consulted unions on policies that are likely to have significant implications for current and future employment. It is a fair assumption to make that those councils responding to a TUC / Union survey are likely to be more sympathetic to the concept of union consultation. Across the whole range of councils with climate emergency policies the percentage is likely to be much lower.

### **Opportunities for union engagement**

Most councils that responded accepted that consultation on climate policy should be part of union facility time and training (85%). In the absence of legal rights, it will be important for unions to ensure there is appropriate recognition for this to support lead officers to participate effectively on this issue.

### **The way forward**

The joint trade union side in every authority needs to research the current state of play on climate policy. Guidance on this can be found at [GJA-Guidance-doc.pdf \(greenerjobsalliance.co.uk\)](https://greenerjobsalliance.co.uk/GJA-Guidance-doc.pdf)

If there are difficulties identifying a member of the one of the recognised unions then assistance may be available from a community-based trade union body like a trades council. For example, the GJA worked jointly with Battersea and Wandsworth TUC to assess and advise on the LB Wandsworth climate plans [Becoming-the-Greenest-Inner-London-Borough-summary.pdf \(greenerjobsalliance.co.uk\)](https://greenerjobsalliance.co.uk/Becoming-the-Greenest-Inner-London-Borough-summary.pdf)

### **Selecting issues that will make a major difference to local emissions**

Many councils have climate action plans that focus on policies that have a marginal impact. Unions need to prioritise those that will have the best results on carbon emissions, jobs, skills development, the cost of living, and equality. Energy efficiency measures represent one of the best ways to tackle all five of these.

One of the biggest disconnects in climate strategy is between retrofit policy and implementation. This applies across national, regional, and local authorities. This side of a general election the opportunity to influence UK government policy is more limited, but there is scope for making some progress in other countries in the UK and at a regional and sub-regional level. A key part of addressing this is for every local authority to co-ordinate action around energy efficiency in housing and other buildings. The GJA published guidance 'Getting the union voice heard – a trade union guide to retrofit and energy' [Special Editions | Greener Jobs Alliance](#).

There have been countless publications and research identifying the importance of retrofit. Recently the New Economics Federation has called for an upgrade of 19 million homes by 2030 [Home | Great Homes Upgrade](#).

A Great Homes Upgrade could create 500,000 jobs, save families millions of pounds, eradicate damp, and power our homes with clean energy. It therefore makes perfect sense for unions to seize the opportunity to help drive this agenda.

A Retrofit Taskforce is needed in every local authority to:

- Tackle fuel poverty [Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit | Poorly insulated homes to pay... \(eciu.net\)](#)
- Create jobs
- Develop a skilled workforce that reflects all sections of the community
- Deliver on climate emergency plans
- Lobby regional and national governments to provide funding and a coherent policy framework

This should be made up of unions, employers, training providers, housing providers and co-ordinated by an officer from the local authority.

For further information see [Getting-the-union-voice-heard-on-green-jobs-and-skills.pdf \(greenerjobsalliance.co.uk\)](#)

## **Appendix 1 – Survey questions**

London Region example [Survey of London local authority climate-related engagement with trade unions \(office.com\)](#)