

## Environmental Law Foundation policy clinic project

The Environmental Law Foundation (ELF) is a charity which helps the voice of ordinary people and communities to be heard on matters affecting the environment in which they live. ELF focuses on participation and access to justice providing free information and guidance on environmental issues for individuals and communities. They also work in partnership with university based law clinics, specialist environmental lawyers and technical expert: see <https://elflaw.org/about-us/>.

ELF has been working with university clinics and others since 2020 on climate change policy. They have been exploring what the climate emergency declarations (CEDs) made since 2019 by most local authorities mean in practice and how the statements made may be resulting in real time and real life carbon reductions; something critical to mitigating climate change. The research to date has found that most councils have committed to reaching a 'net zero' target for their own emissions by 2030; a target generally based upon the GHG Protocol and reference to Scope 1 to 3 emissions. This should mean that they have reduced their emissions to 1990 GHG levels; which is considered by government to be acceptable<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, these targets appear broadly consistent the UK Government's national targets revised in 2019 of reducing carbon emissions throughout the UK (i.e. not just in government buildings but in homes, work, within transport, towns and cities):

- by 68% of 1990 levels by 2030;
- by 78% by 2035; and
- by 100% by 2050<sup>2</sup>.

In simple terms, the UK Government has committed to carbon reduction of two-thirds in 10 years and by over three quarters in 15 years.

ELF aims to continue its collaborative climate emergency research work for a third year and to try to clarify whether local authorities will be on track to meet their own 2030 net-zero targets. This timing of this apt. Local authorities are now roughly one third along the timeline between the CEDs being made and 'net-zero 2030' and, by analogy with the national commitment, many councils should have already reduced their GHG emissions by two-thirds to be heading towards net-zero with specific carbon figures being calculated and published.

The ELF year 3 climate emergency research will aim to:

1. draw upon and update the UK data gathered by universities to date to clarify the commitment of each local authority in their CEDs or otherwise;
2. review the action plans and strategies that have been set including any key performance indicators (KPIs) that set interim and final targets to 2030; and
3. evaluate whether the carbon reduction work has been effective at lowering council GHG emissions in the long term.

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. the advice of the UK Government advisory body: the Climate Change Committee.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g., s. 1 of the Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended), the Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement 2015 of 4.12.20, the 6<sup>th</sup> Carbon Budget of 20.4.21 and the Carbon Budget Order 2021/750.

The year 3 climate work will be achieved by the universities, through their law policy clinics:

1. carrying out desk top research and reporting on current position of local authorities in relation to (a) CEDs or otherwise, (b) action plans (c) targets that have been met; (*Nov-Dec 2022*);
2. undertaking environmental information (EI) requests to local authorities asking for clarification on any information gaps in the research outcomes from 1(a)-(c); (*Jan-Feb 2023*); and
3. report to ELF on the findings of (1) and (2) in order to assess the national picture in terms of local authority effectiveness on meeting reduction targets (*Mar-April 2023*). The ELF report should synthesise the findings providing a summary of effective climate reduction by councils and highlighting any areas of concern.