

Case Study:

HOW IS CORNWALL LEVELLING UP BY ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

December 2022

ADEPT

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

INTRODUCTION

The aspiration behind the government's National Adaptation Programme (2018-2023) was for local government to play a central role in leading and supporting local places to become more resilient to the changing climate.

The recent UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (2022) highlighted the urgency of action to tackle the risks arising from climate change, recognising that evidence showed we must be prepared for warming up to 4°C.

Local authorities understand climate change risks and impacts in their areas. They are uniquely well-placed to reduce carbon emissions from key sectors (including buildings, transport, energy and waste), and to help places adapt.

Most UK councils have declared climate emergencies, however activity mostly focuses on reducing carbon emissions, with less emphasis on planning for and adapting to the changing climate.

The Climate Change Committee provides an independent assessment of the UK's climate risks under the Climate Change Act. Its latest report found that adaptation governance had weakened over the last decade, and recommended urgent action to integrate adaptation policies and plan for the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

In addition to the established concerns around flooding and water scarcity, a series of urgent risks have been identified, including:

- the loss of key habitats and species
- a deterioration in soil health
- risks to people and the economies from failures of the power system
- risks to health and wellbeing from exposure to heat in homes / buildings

The Climate Change Committee highlighted areas where government policy under the levelling up agenda must go further to address the impacts of the climate emergency – including the need for comprehensive planning for adapting to climate change.

EMBEDDING ADAPTATION IN KEY DECISIONS AND SERVICE PLANS

The environment is central to life in Cornwall with the climate having immediate impacts on people's lives and the economy. Recognising this, Cornwall Council declared a Climate Emergency in January 2019 and followed this with a Climate Change Plan in July 2019.

The Council established a trio of strategic teams to address the climate emergency. The Environmental Resilience and Adaptation team sits alongside the Carbon Neutral Cornwall team and the Ecological Emergency team.

The Resilience and Adaptation team reports to the Cornwall Strategic Resilience Board and has a strategic role with oversight of Shoreline Management Plans, Local Flood Risk and Natural Flood Risk Management Strategies.

Following the climate emergency declaration, Cornwall Council has developed a strategic decision wheel based on the Doughnut Economics model pioneered by Kate Raworth, ensuring that cabinet decisions take full consideration of their environmental as well as social and economic impacts.

Climate Change Adaptation is one of 11 environmental indicators that are part of the outer ring of Cornwall's decision wheel, considered alongside 11 social indicators. The model has helped to move adaptation up the agenda and to grow understanding and awareness.



WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

Cornwall Council has commissioned a local climate risk assessment to provide a specific risk profile for people and places in Cornwall. The next step will be to develop and adopt a local adaptation strategy, setting out how adaptation will be integrated in the Council's policies and plans.

The Council plans to recruit a dedicated Adaptation and Resilience Strategy Officer and support role to lead this work.

A key part of their work will be to engage across council departments, working with a dedicated lead in each service area. The Council will also engage with communities through parishes and neighbourhood groups to develop neighbourhood adaptation plans, where these are needed. In coastal areas this will incorporate recommendations from Shoreline Management Plans.

There are a number of active local community groups focused on adaptation, particularly in coastal areas. There is an ongoing need to engage in less affluent areas so that all communities are aware and involved in formulating adaptation plans where these are needed.

Alongside the strategy work, Cornwall Council is an active partner in local adaptation projects including collaborating with the Environment Agency (and wider partners) on a project to look at the future of sand dunes in Cornwall.

'Making Space for Sand' is being delivered through Defra's Innovative Resilience Programme and will look at the state of the area's sand dunes and the actions needed to make them more sustainable in the face of climate and coastal change.

Cornwall Council also recently collaborated on a project to develop a Local Climate Assessment Tool (LCAT) working with the European Centre for Environment and Human Health (ECEHH) based at the University of Exeter and local social enterprise, Then Try This.

LCAT brings together climate models from the Met Office, health impact evidence and practical adaptation options to identify the health implications of climate change in a local area. The tool is at prototype stage, with the current model looking at Cornwall and active travel. The next iteration, with UK wide data and a broader range of impact areas, is due in autumn 2022.

LCAT offers the potential to generate recommendations of appropriate adaptation approaches for any public service area, charity or business. This could be helpful to professionals in local authorities and other public setting bodies as part of their planning.



Image kindly supplied by Nick Turley

SUCCESS FACTORS

- **Delivery structure:** Cornwall Council had a well-established team working on climate change and has put in place a dedicated team to focus on resilience and adaptation.
- **Cross party support:** the decision wheel, incorporating adaptation, was endorsed by all parties and remained in place despite a change of political control.
- **Strong partnerships:** LCAT was developed through a partnership between the University of Exeter, Cornwall Council and Then Try This. The University attracted external funding to research and develop the tool.
- **Community support:** there is strong external support from communities, including active pressure groups such as Extinction Rebellion.
- **External funding:** Cornwall Council has benefitted from external funding to support its work on LCAT via the Local Government Association's Net Zero Innovation Programme during 2020-21. The tool was supported by various sources of funding including: The Alan Turing Institute, The Schroder Foundation, Research England's Policy Support Fund.

CONSTRAINTS

- **Stakeholder feedback gathered during the development of LCAT highlighted some of the barriers that all local authorities face to working on adaptation.** These include a lack of confidence, knowledge and expertise and a lack of resource relating to adaptation. The tool could help to address these by providing practical adaptation options and by interpreting the data sets for users, providing a bespoke output.
- **Cornwall Council has been through a restructuring programme, with a loss of c.800 staff.** Like other councils, there are ongoing pressures on resources across teams.
- **Some communities are better resourced (time, people) than others to engage with adaptation planning.** This can make it difficult to take a fair and equitable approach.

LEARNING POINTS

- **There are no specific hooks or missions in the Levelling Up White paper** for adapting to climate change, although there are references to resilience to natural hazards as part of the prospectus for the [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#). This could be strengthened, making adapting to climate change an explicit mission of levelling up. This would help to promote a socially just approach to adaptation - with a focus on lower-income areas at greatest climate risk including coastal change.
- **Funding for adaptation planning:** there is no specific funding for adaptation planning, although there is capital funding for flooding and coastal risk projects through Defra Grant in Aid. Cornwall Council's environment teams have benefited from long-term funding from the European Regional Development Fund, which will finish at the end of 2023. This will put pressure on new sources of funding such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- **Integration across service areas:** Cornwall Council has recognised the need to engage across council service areas, including adult and children's services, so that adapting to climate change is on every team's radar and not just a problem for environmental services.
- **There are strong social and economic imperatives** for local authorities to plan for future climate change. In Cornwall these are well recognised due to its coastal location, importance of fishing and tourism sector, and poorer communities.

LINKS

LCAT project summary: [New Local Climate Adaptation Tool Supports Health and Wellbeing - European Centre for Environment and Human Health | ECEHH](#)

Prototype tool: [Climate and Health Tool \(beta\) \(lcat.uk\)](#)

Sniffer/ Scottish Government resources on adaptation: <https://www.adaptationscotland.org.uk/>

Local Partnerships Adaptation Toolkit:

https://localpartnerships.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Local_Partnerships_Climate_Adaptation_Toolkit_v1.pdf

ADEPT Policy Position on Climate Change and Green Growth:

<https://adeptnet.org.uk/system/files/documents/ADEPT%20CC%26GG%20Policy%20Position%20May%202022.pdf>

Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk (June 2021) Climate Change Committee:

[Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk - Climate Change Committee \(theccc.org.uk\)](#)

UK Climate Risk Assessment 2022 (Jan 2022) Defra:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-climate-change-risk-assessment-2022>

Levelling Up the United Kingdom (Feb 2022), Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, via:

<http://www.gov.uk/official-documents>

During 2022, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport led a project to explore how local authorities are levelling up through action to address disparities in multiple domains - public health, local environmental quality, exposure to climate risk and socio-economic deprivation.

This project was in collaboration with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the Association of Directors of Public Health, the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Local Government Association, recognising the synergies between our work areas, and the links between wellbeing and place.

This case study is one of a series of examples which look at how local authorities are levelling up, across service areas.

- ADEPT members are the place-making strategists and policy shapers across top tier local authority areas
- ADEPT members are specialists, delivering services and sharing best practice across key sectors including environment, planning, housing, transport and economy
- ADEPT members design strategies for the future, taking communities beyond 2035
- ADEPT members operate in networks, cutting through boundaries to work with partners across the political, public, private and community sectors
- ADEPT members provide opportunities to develop new talent, supporting the place directors of tomorrow

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