

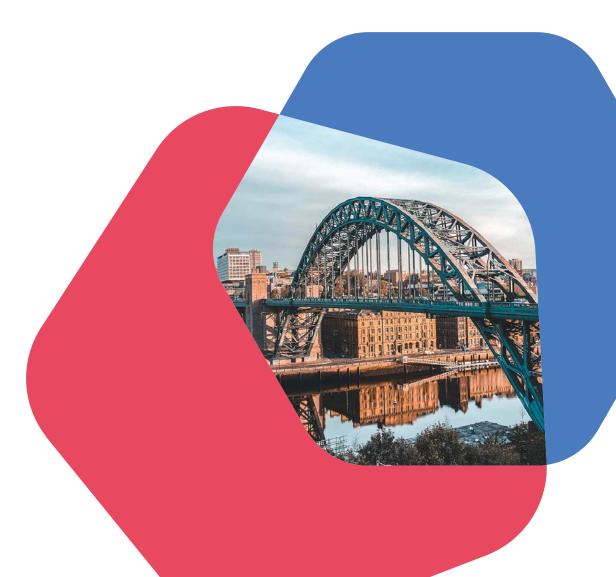


Climate action, city regions and central government: a comparative analysis of the UK City Deals

Summary

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Key messages

- 19 of the 35 City Deals include measures on climate change mitigation, but only one addresses climate change adaptation.
- Most measures build on existing initiatives or focus on individual projects or specific issues; there is a lack of joinedup approaches.

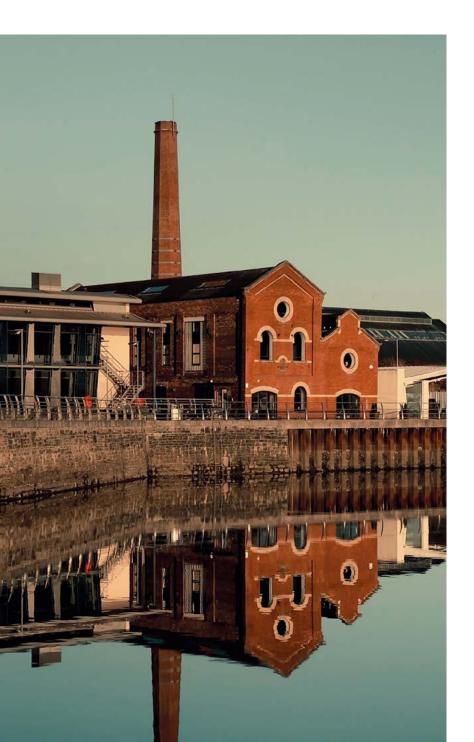
Despite the existence of national and international climate targets and agreements, there is widespread recognition of climate action inertia; many central governments – particularly those from the Global North - are struggling to transition their economies away from fossil fuels to the extent, and at the pace that was agreed during the Paris Accord negotiations. In the United Kingdom, the government's own advisors have criticised the inadequate headway made by successive ruling parties and coalitions. Within this context, attention is increasingly turning to subnational institutions and actors (particularly local government) and the potential roles which they could play in driving climate action at local and regional levels. Shining a light on local climate action can help us to understand the scope for innovation and leadership in climate action, the emergence of place-based opportunities and the various barriers and challenges that local and regional actors face. From a practical point of view, the underlying rationale for research in this domain, is to learn from local initiatives and to help share that learning across actor communities and local to central government, so that good practice in climate action can be replicated and scaled up, thus accelerating the low carbon transition.

Our research

The aim of this study was to identify and understand variations in subnational priorities and ambitions related to climate action.

We focused on the City Deal, which across the United Kingdom has constituted a substantive programme of subnational development over the past decade. With 35 Deals concluded to date, this is a particularly suitable programme to explore through comparative analysis as the ambitions were set by central government (e.g. stimulate economic growth), yet allowed some flexibility for subnational actors to negotiate and deliver upon local and regional priorities. Furthermore, the programme reflects approaches favoured by successive UK governments, including deal-making and the clustering of local authorities.

We used a thematic analysis to identify the developmental priorities of each City region, and scored their relative importance. This is summarised in the 'heatmap' below, which allows high level comparisons between the 35 City Deals. Secondly, we sought to understand observed variability in these priorities. We did this by grouping city regions according to key socio-economic and spatio-temporal characteristics and assessing if these could be associated with the thematic priorities. Finally we examined how climate action was explained or justified in the City Deal document, to understand some of the common factors.



Our analysis

Our findings show significant diversity between the Deals. Some show strong engagement with climate action but others fail to mention it. However, overall, concerns for climate mitigation and adaptation were far outweighed by other local/regional priorities, most notably **Growth, Finance, Investment and Trade**, but also **People and Skills**, **Science and Innovation**, **Transport** and **Housing**. In Deals where climate action was found to be a priority, the scope was often restricted to specific projects (e.g. low-carbon pilots, energy efficiency retrofits) as opposed to more holistic or embedded approaches. Climate change adaptation was notably absent as a priority, with the exception of Greater Brighton. It is only included in the table because we took a comprehensive look at climate action in the City Deals documents, i.e. considering both mitigation and adaptation.

Table 1: Heat map to illustrate the prominence of themes found in the 35 City Deal documents. The eight themes have been ranked left to right, from most prominent (dark green) to least prominent (light green). The left hand column of the table follows the order of 1st wave, 2nd wave, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland deals – each region is hyperlinked to relevant online documentation

City Deal	Year	Growth, finance, investment & trade	People and skills	Science & innovation	Transport	Housing	Climate change mitigation	Culture & tourism	Climate change adaptation
Bristol City Region	2012								
<u>Greater Birmingham</u>	2012								
Greater Manchester	2012								
Leeds City Region	2012								
<u>Liverpool City Region</u>	2012								
<u>Newcastle</u>	2012								
<u>Nottingham</u>	2012								
Sheffield City Region	2012								
Black Country	2014								
Greater Brighton	2014								
Greater Cambridge	2014								
Coventry and Warwickshire	2014								
Hull & Humber	2014								
Greater Ipswich	2014								
<u>Leicester & Leicestershire</u>	2014								
Greater Norwich	2014								
Oxford & Oxfordshire	2014								

Prominence in city deal documentation:

- No reference
- 1 Passing reference
- 2 Featured more than once





City Deal	Year	Growth, finance, investment & trade	People and skills	Science & innovation	Transport	Housing	Climate change mitigation	Culture & tourism	Climate change adaptation
Plymouth and the SW Peninsula	2014								
Preston, South Ribble & Lancashire	2014								
Southampton & Portsmouth	2014								
Southend-On-Sea	2014								
Stoke-On-Trent & Staffordshire	2014								
Sunderland and South Tyneside	2014								
Swindon & Wiltshire	2014								
Tees Valley	2014								
Thames Valley Berkshire	2014								
Aberdeen City Region	2016								
Inverness & Highland	2016								
Edinburgh & South East Scotland	2018								
Glasgow & Clyde Valley	2014								
Stirling & Clackmannanshire	2020								
Tay Cities Region	2020								
Cardiff Capital Region	2016								
Swansea Bay City Region	2017								
Belfast City Region	2019								

Prominence in city deal documentation:

- No reference
- 1 Passing reference
- **2** Featured more than once







Our findings also showed that all city regions that did prioritise climate action (with the exception of Cardiff Capital Region), were drawing on one or more of the following six factors to narrate, explain or justify their climate action ambitions:

- overcoming barriers or tackling issues
- building on past projects or current initiatives
- taking advantage of geographical specificities/ natural resources
- leveraging, or building upon, existing material assets
- leveraging strong partnership with, or existing investment by, private sector
- leveraging existing knowledge-based assets

In Deals where climate change mitigation is fundamental or important, the most common factor is building on past projects or current initiatives (cited by 9 out of 11), followed by taking advantage of geographical specificities or natural resources (cited by 6 out of 11). In Deals where climate change mitigation features less prominently, overcoming barriers or tackling issues is by far the single most important factor (cited by 6 out of 8). It could be argued that most factors relate to existing assets and therefore represent continuity in regional policy making, whilst overcoming barriers or tackling issues is more problem-driven and could potentially represent a more disruptive approach or innovative policy within the regional context. On the other hand, the Deals which embrace multiple factors, have the potential to represent more joined up thinking.

Region	Building on past	Taking advantage	Leveraging, or	Leveraging strong	Overcome barriers	Leveraging existing knowledge based assets	
	projects & current initiatives	of geographic specificities/ natural resources	building upon existing material assets	partnership with, or existing investment by, private sector	(e.g. to growth) or tackle issues (e.g. fuel poverty)		
Deals where Climate change n	nitigation is fundamenta	or important to strateg	у				
Birmingham	1						
Manchester	✓	✓	1	✓		/	
Liverpool		✓			✓		
Leeds	✓						
Newcastle	✓	✓	/	✓		J	
Nottingham	✓		✓				
Stoke-on-Trent	✓				✓		
Tees Valley	✓	✓	1				
Stirling & Clackmannanshire	✓				✓		
Tay Cities	✓	✓			✓		
Swansea		✓	✓		✓		
Deals where Climate change n	nitigation featured but w	as not fundamental or i	mportant to strategy				
Sheffield						✓	
Greater Brighton				✓	✓		
Plymouth & the South West					✓		
Hull & Humber		✓			✓		
Greater Cambridge					✓		
Inverness & Highlands					✓		
Edinburgh and South East					✓		
Cardiff Capital Region							

Energy demand solutions

Concerning energy demand solutions, energy efficient housing constitutes the most prevalent solution identified throughout the Deal texts. This takes the form of both housing retrofit (e.g. Manchester and Birmingham), and new-build housing (e.g. Swansea and Inverness/Highland). However, our findings suggest that - more often than not - there is a disconnect between housing ambitions on the one hand, and climate action ambitions on the other. Joined up thinking which seeks to marry presently unconnected priorities is frequently missing from Deal outcomes when considered as a whole.

needed to shed more light on those policy failures, not only to understand why opportunities were missed in the past, but also to try to remedy existing strategies and (where still possible) find out how to adopt some of the good practices found in some of the deals, into the existing plans of others. Having shared our findings in this working paper, we welcome constructive feedback, scrutiny and further discussion on these matters at this crucial time when climate action needs to be accelerated at both the national and the local level.

Going beyond the methodological restrictions of this desk-based

comparative policy document analysis, follow-up research is

What next?

In summary, whilst the City Deal was not originally designed to prioritise climate action, it is important to note that during the last decade this policy did not seek to remedy this omission. This could be seen as a clear failure in joined-up policy making in central government, since the City Deal was a substantive policy, developed at a time when the UK already had legally binding emission reduction targets and the importance climate change adaptation and mitigation were already well understood by scientific and policy expert communities. The fact that some City Deals did embrace climate action and others did not, suggests strongly that (notwithstanding the lack of central government push) there was important scope for more local ambition. We observed strong variation with regards to climate action and the fact that many City Deals did not capitalise on this opportunity, would seem to represent evidence of policy failure at the local/ regional level.



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About CREDS

The Centre for Research into Energy Demand Solutions (CREDS) was established as part of the UK Research and Innovation's Energy Programme in April 2018, with funding of £19.5M over 5 years. Its mission is to make the UK a leader in understanding the changes in energy demand needed for the transition to a secure and affordable, low carbon energy system. CREDS has a team of over 100 people based at 15 UK universities.

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