

# Chapter nine: Championing local authorities to deliver for the environment



# Priority actions for the UK Government: Local authorities



## 1 Devolve powers & resources...

Champion local authorities to deliver for the environment by clarifying their responsibilities and increasing their powers and resources.



## 2 speed up delivery...

Accelerate the delivery of England's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP).



## 3 ...and monitor for success.

Make monitoring, evaluation and response an essential part of the design and implementation of policy.

# “Plans must urgently be turned into actions nationally and locally to stop the spiralling decline of our natural world.”

Policy delivery is the environmental challenge of the next decade.

The UK now has a web of environmental policies and plans in place, at the centre of which are the [Environment Act](#) and the [Environmental Improvement Plans](#), as well as their equivalents in the devolved nations. These policies connect across departments, public bodies, and local authorities.

Many targets and commitments have not been delivered. The OEP's [2024 Progress Report](#) found that only four out of forty of the Government's environmental targets are on track. The CCC's [2023 Progress Report](#) downgraded the likelihood of the UK meeting its medium-term targets and called for the Government to 'stay firm on existing commitments and move to delivery'.

While further ambition on the environment and net zero is still needed to address policy gaps, the UK must make delivery a priority.

Plans must urgently be turned into actions nationally and locally to stop the spiralling decline of our natural world and the resulting harms to communities and the economy.

Local authorities have a crucial role to play in shaping and delivering these outcomes, which cannot be achieved without them. They need the power and resources to play their part.

Decision makers must understand what works and the risks to successful delivery.

Scientists working in local authorities and delivery organisations have indispensable insights on environmental challenges and solutions. They need support to deliver for people, the economy, and the environment.

## Box 8. About EPIC

The [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#) (EPIC) is a member-led, specialist interest group of local authority officers and other environmental professionals delivering environmental protection, climate action and nature recovery on the ground.

The Community works together to understand delivery challenges, share good practice and advocate for implementation-minded policy.

## 1. Champion local authorities to deliver for the environment by clarifying their responsibilities and increasing their powers and resources.

- i. Adopt consistent and coherent **governance** for implementation, including clear responsibilities for local authorities and delivery organisations on their roles in policy design and evaluation.
- ii. Devolve powers to communities and local authorities for sustainable & active transport, air quality management & wood burning, and nature, with the capacity and resources needed to use them.
- iii. Work with environmental scientists to provide local authorities with access to expertise through training, guidance, and information sharing, as well as support to work together on cross boundary issues.
- iv. Provide long-term non-competitive funding for environmental schemes, allowing local authorities to operate under greater certainty. Commit to funding **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** for the next 10 years, increasing confidence in their delivery.

This aligns with the Government's **commentary in its manifesto** that **"local leaders understand local ambitions and strengths."**

This realises the Government's **manifesto commitment** to **"transfer power out of Westminster, and into our communities ... ensure those places have the strong governance arrangements, capacity, and capability to deliver, providing central support where needed."**

This aligns with the Government's **manifesto commitment** that **"to provide greater stability, a Labour government will give councils multi-year funding settlements and end wasteful competitive bidding."**

## 2. Accelerate the delivery of England's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP).

- i. Develop and implement transparent, coherent and detailed delivery plans for England's EIP, based on the recommendations of the OEP.
- ii. Design delivery plans to achieve multiple co-benefits, communicate implementation risks and allow for a flexible approach to interim targets which enables innovation.

These support the **goal of the last Environment Secretary** to **"ensure the existing environmental improvement plan is fit for purpose."**

## 3. Make monitoring, evaluation and response an essential part of the design and implementation of policy.

- i. Provide sufficient resources for ongoing policy evaluations and continuous learning and review, so that it is clear whether policies are working as intended. Conduct an urgent assessment of the delivery of statutory Biodiversity Net Gain, as **recommended by the NAO**.
- ii. Work with environmental scientists to produce a robust framework for prospective analysis of environmental policies, going beyond monitoring and evaluation to understand the drivers and barriers to successful delivery.
- iii. Work with environmental scientists to ensure that the **Outcome Indicator Framework** contains indicators and metrics which are appropriate for evaluating the success of policies.

This supports the **Government's approach** to **"ambitious, measurable, long-term objectives"** particularly for its missions and their focus on delivery and public service.

This is in line with the Government's general **approach in its manifesto** to **"work closely with business to map and address the delivery challenges we face."**

**“Policy delivery is the environmental challenge of the next decade.”**

