



# Public engagement and net zero

## *How government should involve citizens in climate policy making*

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### Summary

The UK's progress in reducing emissions to date has largely been achieved in the power sector. That has meant government working with a few large energy companies while customers, mostly unaware, go on consuming whatever electricity comes through their sockets. Electricity prices have risen a bit, but improvements in energy efficiency have protected consumer bills.

Reaching net zero will be different. It will require an economy-wide transformation, led by government and supported by businesses, communities and individuals. This transition will unlock substantial benefits – and the costs of delay or inaction could be much higher. But reaching net zero will still require substantial upfront investments, and the cost of these will need to be distributed fairly. People's lives will have to change, from the way they travel and heat their homes, to what they eat and drink. The transition will be successful only if government works with people, rather than imposing solutions from on high.

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Public engagement will be critical. This term can be used to refer to a range of approaches, including communications to raise awareness, interventions to change behaviour and processes to enable participation in policy design.<sup>1</sup> While the first two are very important, and all three are often related, this paper focuses on the third. This category of public engagement itself includes a wide range of methods, from citizens' assemblies and juries to co-production and crowdsourcing (see the box at the end of this summary). But while the format may vary, the aim is simple: to involve citizens or residents, sometimes alongside others, in shaping decision making.

Long used in policy areas from health to planning, these tools are now being increasingly applied to climate change. Climate Assembly UK, organised in 2020 by parliament (not government), involved a hundred members of the public, informed by experts, deliberating over the choices involved in the UK meeting its net zero target. High-profile climate assemblies have also been conducted in countries including Denmark, France and Scotland, as well as by local authorities. Governments, parliaments and civil society around the globe are using a wide range of further methods, including participatory budgeting, from national to community level.<sup>2</sup>

The Climate Change Committee, the government's official adviser on climate change, has called on government departments to involve people "as part of a national conversation on the options available for achieving net zero".<sup>3</sup> Ministers, too, appear to increasingly recognise the value of public engagement; several lauded Climate Assembly UK as an important step and pledged to build on it.<sup>4</sup> An Institute for Government report in 2020 argued that well-planned and conducted public engagement would be crucial to secure consent for the government's chosen pathway to net zero.<sup>5</sup>

But the government has yet to commit to making public engagement part of its net zero strategy, nor has it set out a clear plan for how it might go about it. And while attitudes are starting to change, departments have historically struggled to embed public engagement into their policy making. A 2016 Institute for Government report identified three barriers that stood in the way:

- A perception that it is a 'regulatory burden' with little benefit
- A lack of resources
- A concern that special interest or protest groups could hijack engagement.<sup>6</sup>

Departments may also fret about public engagement exposing the absence of fully worked-up proposals. While Climate Assembly UK may have acted as a proof of concept to sceptical policy makers – official and ministerial – there is still a risk that public engagement will remain the exception, not the norm.

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This paper aims to help decision makers in UK government think through when and how to use public engagement in delivering net zero. It builds on the Institute for Government's research on policy making and climate change, and public engagement charity Involve's specialism in engaging the public in decision making.\* It is informed by a roundtable that both organisations jointly held in January 2021, and additional conversations with public engagement practitioners.

The paper sets out five lessons for policy makers thinking about how to design exercises:

- 1. Ensure the methods fit the brief**, using the tendering process to draw on external expertise to find the most appropriate approach
- 2. Consider a range of methods**, including deliberative and participatory approaches, in-person and online activities, and a range of digital tools
- 3. Make the process fully transparent and beyond reproach**, explaining how participants are chosen, the information they are given and how decisions are made
- 4. Involve a wide range of stakeholders to increase quality and impact**, including local civic groups, civil society organisations, businesses, academics and professional organisations
- 5. Make exercises genuinely inclusive**, for example by covering the costs of participation, supporting those without digital skills and allowing enough time to build relationships.

These lessons capture general good practice. However, applying them in net zero policy making will be particularly important, given the transition will involve such major changes in the structure of the economy and in people's lives. Whether it is designing taxes and subsidies to support the replacement of gas boilers or thinking through shifts in diet – net zero policies are unlikely to succeed if the public are not effectively involved.

Currently, the government is not well set up to do this.

Within Whitehall, capability and expertise on public engagement are limited. And there is little co-ordination of activities across government. In many departments, engaging the public is not prioritised as a part of policy making. The paper recommends that:

- Departments should invest in strengthening the public engagement expertise needed to plan and commission exercises effectively – this will be beneficial not only for net zero but also for other priorities, such as 'levelling up'

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\* Involve is the UK's leading public participation charity. It develops, supports and campaigns for new ways of involving people in the decisions that affect their lives. It has played a key role in delivering several of the examples of public engagement mentioned in this paper, including Climate Assembly UK, Scotland's Climate Assembly and Our Zero Selby. It also manages the Sciencewise programme.

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- Either the Cabinet Office or the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) should take increased responsibility for co-ordinating net zero public engagement across government and act as a hub, developing expertise, standards and best practice for other departments to follow
  - The government should set out in the net zero strategy, due in the autumn of this year, how it intends to use public engagement to inform the design of net zero policies. Building on this, it should develop a more detailed public engagement strategy for net zero
  - The Climate Change Committee should play a greater role in advising government on what public engagement to commission.

This paper is divided into four sections:

1. What are the benefits of public engagement?
2. When does public engagement work best?
3. How can public engagement deliver most value?
4. How should the government equip itself to engage the public on net zero?

### Box 1 **Methods of public engagement in decision making**

A distinction is often drawn between participatory and deliberative forms of engagement, although in practice there is significant overlap.

*Participatory* forms of engagement typically focus on providing opportunities for people to be involved in decisions and activities that affect their lives. Sometimes this can be targeted at specific groups of people who are particularly affected by an issue or have specific experiences and knowledge to offer, while in other instances it can present opportunities for anyone to engage. Some examples of participatory methods are listed below.

- **Co-production** refers to processes that bring the public and decision makers together in an equal partnership. Collectively, they define the problem to be addressed and co-develop solutions. In some contexts, they also go on to deliver the solutions together. The process can involve wider actors such as civil society groups.
- **Crowdsourcing** is the process of collecting ideas, services and/or resources from a large and undefined network of people. It seeks to harness collaboration for problem solving, innovation and efficiency, involving as many people as possible to reach a solution or goal.

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- **Participatory budgeting** delegates power or influence over budgets, investment priorities and/or economic spending to citizens. It is most often used at a local or neighbourhood level to allocate budgets, but Portugal has recently pioneered its use at a national level.

*Deliberative* forms of engagement typically focus on the quality of dialogue, providing opportunities for people to share and test ideas through inclusive and respectful conversations. Often, this is done with demographically representative groups of the public, such as is the case with citizens' assemblies and citizens' juries. Examples of deliberative methods include the following:

- **Appreciative inquiry** works with members of the public to build a vision for the future. Unlike many engagement processes, it starts by asking "what works?" (as opposed to "what are the problems?"), focusing on past and potential future successes.
- **Citizens' assemblies** bring together a group of members of the public (typically 50 to 250 people) to discuss an issue or issues and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen. The people who take part are chosen so they reflect the wider population – in terms of demographics (for example, age, gender, ethnicity and social class) and sometimes relevant attitudes (for example, concern about climate change).
- **Citizens' juries** are similar to citizens' assemblies but bring together smaller groups of members of the public (typically 12 to 24 people) to deliberate and reach conclusions about an issue. Like citizens' assemblies, they involve a group that is broadly demographically representative of the population.
- **Community conversations** are a decentralised approach to deliberation. They support groups of participants to set up their own events to discuss a topic, often aided by prompts, materials and resources from the organisers. Groups feed their conclusions back to the organisers for synthesising into the decision making process.

## 1. What are the benefits of public engagement?

Public engagement can have a wide range of benefits, including for those involved in it. Here we focus on its ability to improve policy. It can help policy makers to learn from those with direct experience, address existing inequities and avoid creating new ones. It can build legitimacy and avoid implementation problems. But public engagement also carries the risk of frustration and disenchantment if it is not incorporated effectively into decision making.

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## Public engagement can help inform policy making

A core reason that policy makers should engage the public is to ensure that a wide range of views and expertise informs decision making.

Members of the public, or people from communities that will be directly affected by decisions, will have knowledge, ideas and experience that policy makers do not – particularly if policy makers are far removed from the impact of their decisions. Participatory processes can enable policy makers to tap into this wealth of insight to inform policy. They can also enable policy makers to harness people’s creativity and resourcefulness to find novel solutions to problems and/or tackle issues themselves.

Decision makers need to understand the views and values of the public if they are to make effective and durable policy. It is possible to test levels of acceptability and support for policy ideas through surveys of a large sample of people. But deliberative processes, in particular, can enable policy makers to develop a deeper understanding of what the public see as the fundamental preconditions for change and the main benefits and drawbacks, and then design and frame policies accordingly.<sup>7</sup>

This depth of public understanding and input, which is typically nuanced, cannot be obtained by polling or focus groups. A recent Green Alliance report on environmental taxes, which drew on a survey by Britain Thinks, illustrated this.<sup>8</sup> It found that:

**“While 59 per cent of people support ‘using the tax system to make environmentally damaging behaviours more expensive’ and even more support using tax ‘to make environmentally beneficial behaviours less expensive’ (62 per cent), only 31 per cent support the general approach of ‘using the tax system to try and change people’s behaviour’.”<sup>9</sup>**

The report highlighted that the government would need “to be very careful about new tax design as well as communicating the reasons for change”.<sup>10</sup> Deeper public engagement could help policy makers to understand public reasoning about environmental taxation in a more nuanced way.

The results of deliberative engagement are not just useful to those directly making policy – those scrutinising or seeking to feed into policy making can find them valuable too. Darren Jones, chair of the BEIS select committee (one of the six committees that established Climate Assembly UK), described the assembly’s findings as his committee’s “bible” when it came to scrutinising government climate policy, providing members with a rich seam of evidence about attitudes and preferences.<sup>11</sup> The Climate Change Committee also made extensive use of the assembly’s findings in preparing its advice on the *Sixth Carbon Budget*.<sup>12</sup>

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## Public engagement can give politicians scope to act

Public engagement, when used well, can afford politicians greater space to act. Research shows that on climate policy, politicians consistently underestimate public concern and support for action.<sup>13</sup> If the public are engaged in decisions, they may show themselves to be more supportive of action than policy makers had supposed.

This has happened in other areas. In 2012, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), an arm's length body of the Department of Health, sought the public's views on two emerging techniques based on in vitro fertilisation (IVF) to prevent the transmission of mitochondrial disease. It commissioned deliberative workshops alongside a representative survey, open public meetings, an online consultation and patient focus groups. The engagement showed broad support for mitochondrial replacement being made available to families at risk of passing on a serious mitochondrial disease, subject to certain safeguards. Subsequently, the Department of Health decided to allow "innovative IVF-based techniques" in these circumstances, subject to safeguards, citing the importance of the public dialogue process.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, deliberative processes allow policy makers to test where the public stands on the degree of acceptable state intervention. There is a long history of policy makers of all parties misreading public opinion on the risks of 'nannying'. Recently, the government (and some scientific advisers) misjudged how willing the public would be to accept strict lockdowns in response to the pandemic. The Covid-19 crisis has also shown enthusiasm for other shifts, such as increased walking and cycling. Public engagement can help policy makers identify which interventions are likely to be acceptable and under what conditions.

Affording politicians greater space to act is an important rationale for public engagement on net zero. Institute for Government research has found that politicians have consistently ducked difficult climate measures that impose costs on voters, for example by freezing fuel duty for the past decade and by avoiding ambitious measures for funding the adoption of low-carbon heating.<sup>15</sup> Yet citizens' assemblies and other public engagement methods have indicated that when presented with evidence and options, the public are willing to look at how to distribute costs and may support actions that politicians thought were out of scope. Climate Assembly UK, for example, suggested that the British public were more willing to consider taxes on flights than many had previously thought (as part of a package to decarbonise transport that included making alternatives such as rail travel cheaper).<sup>16</sup> The government's own work on public attitudes to net zero has shown that the public broadly support the net zero target, have some awareness of where emissions come from and expect policies in the coming decades.<sup>17</sup>

Politicians may worry that rather than giving them space to act, public engagement may bind their hands. Processes may return unpalatable recommendations, which can give ideas a higher profile and make them harder to ignore. But the extent of this risk depends on how processes are run. Participants in deliberative processes hear detailed



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evidence on areas such as ideas' feasibility and costs, and seek agreement despite their own differences in values and lifestyles. Such processes are likely to produce recommendations seen as "proportionate ... and also sensible" or "really balanced and proportionate" – the words used to describe Climate Assembly UK's recommendations by Mel Stride MP, chair of the Treasury Select Committee, and Chris Stark, chief executive of the Climate Change Committee, respectively.<sup>18</sup>

Politicians and officials should also be clear upfront whether public engagement is advisory or decision making – it can be either. And they should ensure engagement is focused on areas that are open to change, and that what is (and is not) in scope is clear to participants. Within these parameters, what the public say may not always be easy for politicians and officials to hear. But they should bear in mind that failure to engage the public properly can lead to eventual U-turns when policies hit a rock in terms of public opposition or problems that public engagement could have predicted. These reversals have costs in terms of both public trust and a loss of time, effort and resources.

### **Public engagement can build legitimacy and trust**

Involving those directly affected by decisions can increase the legitimacy of policy. At a minimum, policy makers can show they have maintained 'procedural fairness' in actively involving those most affected. In Germany, for example, a coal commission was set up to look at how badly affected regions would adapt to the winding down of the coal industry. Even though not all of its recommendations were accepted, its participatory design was important in developing a sense of shared ownership of the managed transition.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, there have been many examples of deindustrialisation where communities have not been engaged and transitions have been poorly managed, resulting in long-term scarring.<sup>20</sup> These include the closing down of coal mines in the UK in the 1980s.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond procedural fairness, public engagement activities show the importance of building public trust that change is being managed fairly. An economy-wide transition such as reaching net zero will bring substantial costs and benefits and a successful transition will be possible only if governments are able to manage it in a way that meets public expectations of fairness. "Fairness within the UK, including for the most vulnerable" was one of the key principles that Climate Assembly UK said should underpin the path to net zero.<sup>22</sup> Assembly members defined fairness in terms of accessibility, affordability, jobs, UK regions, incentives, preferences and more.

### **Public engagement can improve policy implementation**

A key challenge of eliminating the UK's net emissions in the next three decades is how government, business and others will work with people to create, facilitate and support the necessary changes. Yet even when policies have been politically acceptable, they have often faltered because they have been designed with a poor understanding of what is needed to make a policy workable in practice.



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Implementation has often been the Achilles heel of UK policy making. The Green Deal, the coalition government's flagship energy efficiency programme, was abandoned after only two years, having had low take-up and delivered almost no energy savings. The National Audit Office said that the Department of Energy and Climate Change had based the policy on wrong assumptions, failed to test its plans and implemented them chaotically.<sup>23</sup>

The Green Homes Grant, a successor policy designed as a stimulus measure in the 2020 budget, similarly flopped, with the government apparently failing to take account of the lack of a ready-to-go supply chain that could respond quickly. Many homeowners were also put off applying by what was an overly complex scheme.<sup>24</sup> Policy cul-de-sacs, U-turns and schemes that have to be abandoned mid-course like these not only deter business investment, delay action and raise the costs of change – they also risk public and political disillusionment.

Partly these failures have been about poor *stakeholder* engagement; for example, not understanding the concerns of businesses. But they also showed a limited understanding of the public and of consumers.

Involving a range of groups – in the case of policies on retrofitting, for example: builders, homeowners from different income deciles, housing associations, landlords, tenants and so on – more actively in the *design* of policy can help overcome barriers to delivery and take-up that often mean good policy intent fails to translate into action on the ground.

### **Public engagement can help a wider range of views to be heard**

Public engagement can help ensure a voice for people who are often under-represented in decision making. People from different ethnic backgrounds, income deciles or with different medical conditions, for example, can offer expertise and knowledge that are essential to the design of policy, or provide early warning signs of shifts in social attitudes and experiences.

One model that provides a good example of this is that of the UK's Poverty Truth Commissions.\* These commissions are comprised of people experiencing poverty and of senior decision makers. The commissioners collectively work to understand the nature of poverty and some of its underlying causes, and to explore creative ways of addressing them.

The half of the commissioners who are directly experiencing poverty meet together for about six to eight months to build relationships and confidence, before the other commissioners join them – a vital part of the process. As well as impacts on individual commissioners, the commissions have achieved results, including a 75% reduction in evictions by one social housing provider after it moved from a reprimand approach to offering a wellbeing service focused on early intervention.<sup>25</sup>

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\* The Poverty Truth Network supports the work of the commissions. You can find out more about the commissions and how they work on its website: <https://povertytruthnetwork.org>

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Ensuring decision makers are hearing from the full diversity of the UK population will be an important consideration for net zero. For example, the changes required in people's homes could exacerbate existing inequalities and problems such as fuel poverty, if people on lower incomes are less able to afford the changes. Or, depending on how policies are designed, changes could be used as an opportunity to address some of these problems. Climate Assembly UK identified potential negative impacts from the net zero transition for a range of people, including those in rural areas, with mental health conditions or disabilities, on lower incomes or who are less able to get to grips with smart technology.<sup>26</sup>

Good public engagement can incorporate a more comprehensive set of voices into policy development than is typically heard through government consultations and/or parliamentary inquiries, which tend to attract organisations and businesses with a specific stake in the issue. While hearing these perspectives is important, there is a need to balance these interests against the views and values of the wider public.

More generally, public engagement can give space for people with less polarised views to make their voices heard. This can be useful to government in getting a less distorted picture of the public's views and priorities than might be expressed on social media, for example.

### **Public engagement in decision making can have wider benefits**

People who take part in public engagement on net zero can go on to make changes in their own lives. In total, 83% of Climate Assembly UK members\* report making changes to their behaviours since taking part in the assembly.<sup>27</sup>

Participants can also become advocates for climate action, in ways that support the government's climate targets. For example, some members of Climate Assembly UK have gone on to start eco-friendly businesses, become parish councillors or take up new sustainability jobs or roles at work. A documentary about Climate Assembly UK, *The People Vs Climate Change*, shows the potential of having members of the public who are not scientists or climate campaigners talk about the changes needed in everyday lives.<sup>28</sup>

### **Policy makers need to understand the limitations of public engagement**

While these benefits are valuable, politicians need to understand the limitations of public engagement and the risks of using it poorly.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to public engagement, and different public engagement methods have different strengths and weaknesses. Some methods, for example, will be better suited to understanding how citizens would make complex trade-offs, while others are better suited for tapping into the knowledge, ideas and experiences people bring. It is critical that policy makers start out by clearly understanding their purpose for engaging the public, and design or commission engagement accordingly.

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\* Of 83 assembly members who completed a recent evaluation survey.

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It is also important for policy makers to get the response to the outcomes of public engagement right. Unless they have given a particular engagement process decision making power, decision makers do not – indeed should not – follow every recommendation from public engagement slavishly. They still need to make the best decisions in what they judge to be in the public interest. Those involved in deliberative processes, for example, may not have had the time to take proper account of every relevant resource constraint, policy conflict or wider obligation. But it is critical that policy makers account for their decisions and explain their reasoning for taking a different course of action. Experts have described how, when public engagement works well, the relationship between deliberative and representative democracy can be a “productive tension” that enhances legitimacy and decision making rather than a “negative tension” in which competing legitimacies appear to undermine one another.<sup>29</sup> The same is also true of other public engagement methods.

Policy makers should not expect the public to give up their time to take part in a process without thinking carefully about how they will make use of what they say. If politicians do not consider the results seriously or if they appear to use public engagement cynically to give a patina of consent to decisions already made, it can lead to disillusionment, cynicism and backlash. Raising participants’ hopes for action beyond reasonable expectations can also lead to frustration. President Macron created expectations he did not then meet when he pledged to implement the recommendations of the Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (the French national climate assembly) “without filter”.<sup>30</sup>

Instead, politicians and officials need to be ready to seriously consider the results of public engagement and explain what they are taking forward, what they are not taking forward, and why. They also need to manage expectations about how long decisions might take. It is important that policy makers ensure there is ongoing communication with participants about how recommendations are acted upon – experts involved in the Irish Citizens’ Assembly reflected that this did not happen enough, in that case because the secretariat was disbanded after the assembly was completed.<sup>31</sup>

Decision makers should not think of public engagement as a ‘silver bullet’ for resolving tricky policy dilemmas. They will still need to think strategically about how the engagement they commission contributes to the wider decision making and governance processes. Specifically, they will need to ensure that it is commissioned early enough in the process to have an impact, that a variety of engagement processes are commissioned, and that the results are communicated in ways that the wider public can engage with and feed back into the decisions being taken.

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## 2. When does public engagement work best?

Timing is a key factor in the success of public engagement. Policy makers need to think about how engagement links into the policy making process, and ensure it happens early enough to be useful to a decision. They also need to ensure there is enough time for engagement. Participants in deliberative processes need time to build their understanding and reach their conclusions. Participatory processes need time to ensure they engage their intended participants.

### Public engagement can be used at several stages in the policy process

The optimum moment to engage the public will depend on the questions about a policy that government most wants to explore. Points at which it may make sense to involve the public include:

- **To help develop early thinking.** Public engagement can help to give an initial steer about where the public do, and do not, have appetite for change and the form they would prefer to see that change take. This can be about generating a vision for the future into which policy will feed or developing early thinking about policy priorities. The Irish Citizens' Assembly (2016–18) and its work on abortion provides an example. The assembly was asked simply to discuss the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution. From there it developed and voted on its own recommendations, concluding that the existing constitutional clause on abortion should be replaced with another that gave the Irish parliament the power to legislate on the issue. It also made recommendations on the conditions under which abortion should be allowed. Another example is the Kendal Citizens' Jury of 2020, which asked members the open question: What should Kendal do about climate change? Jurors heard background information on climate change, how it related to Kendal and different types of policy approach. They then chose which topics they wanted to focus on in more depth and developed recommendations from scratch. Ultimately they produced recommendations on areas including food, political leadership, energy, transport and planning.
- **To test policy options and approaches.** Public engagement can help when the government is considering a variety of options and approaches and wants to test the public's preferences and priorities, what they support or regard as unacceptable, and how to make the case for change. In 2019, six select committees of the UK parliament commissioned Climate Assembly UK to answer the question: how should the UK reach its target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050? For the assembly's discussions on specific sectors, assembly members were asked to choose between largely predefined scenarios and policy options, providing the select committees with their detailed views on which options they preferred and why. The Department of Energy and Climate Change's 2050 Pathways Calculator is another example of an online participatory approach, which invited people to create their own energy pathway to achieve the UK's emissions reductions through an interactive calculator and simulator.

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- **As an input into policy design.** Once an overall approach or policy direction is set, public engagement can help policy makers with the translation from an idea into a deliverable policy. This can include using public engagement to look at factors that are likely to affect take-up or people's response. For example, now that the UK government has decided to phase out the sale of petrol and diesel cars from 2030 to encourage a switch to low emission vehicles, it may prove valuable to engage members of the public about what is needed to meet the policy goal in the best way. A previous example comes from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, which in 2018 commissioned a Residents' Reference Panel to act as a sounding board for policy development on building safety. The panel met four times over the course of a year to consider areas including access to building safety information, a system for escalation and redress, and questions around the roles and responsibilities of different actors. Their views fed into the ensuing *Building a Safer Future* white paper.<sup>32</sup>

Some approaches to public engagement such as co-production and co-design\* see the public working more closely with decision makers. These approaches are most often applied within public services, but can have relevance in a policy context. The government could usefully adopt this kind of approach to developing its replacement to the Green Homes Grant, for example. Working closely with the supply chain and the public to identify the challenges, and to design policy that overcomes them, should help avoid a repeat of past mistakes.

### Public engagement needs to feed into the decision making process

Whether it is discussing the direction or design of a policy, public engagement needs to feed into decision making. It should be clear in advance who will receive the results, that they are committed to reviewing them seriously, and that the results will be ready in time for them to be useful. It should also be agreed who will respond to participants about which of their ideas are being taken forward and how participants will be kept informed of developments.

Agreeing how public engagement will feed into decisions may be fairly straightforward. For example, the policy team that commissions the engagement may also be the team that will use the results. This was the case in the HFEA engagement on mitochondrial replacement therapy described above. For some processes, however, it may require more careful thought and planning. Some decisions around net zero – for example, the switch to electric vehicles – will cut across the remit of several government departments, as well as potentially those of arm's length bodies and others. Public engagement to inform these decisions may need to feed into multiple decision making processes, requiring involvement from all the relevant teams in planning the engagement.

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\* Co-production and co-design are terms used to refer to processes that bring the public and decision makers – as well as sometimes stakeholders – together in an equal partnership. They collectively define the problem to be addressed and develop solutions. In some contexts, they also go on to deliver the solutions together.

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However public engagement feeds into decisions, policy makers need to begin planning it well in advance. The timescales involved in policy making are often short and officials are time-poor, which some cite as a factor in decisions not to conduct the engagement at all. This means government needs to be good at anticipating what it will need to engage the public on. How long it takes from deciding to commission public engagement to receiving the results will vary hugely depending on procurement rules and the public engagement method used. That means seeking early advice on potential timescales.

As part of preparing for future public engagement, officials will also need to think about what evidence and information they will need to develop – or that will need to be available from others – to be able to involve the public in decisions. The UK will have to make big choices in the next five to ten years about some major policy issues; for example, how to phase out remaining internal combustion engine vehicles in the 2030s and how to replace fuel duty.

But on key decisions, it is likely that the government will want to gain an idea of the acceptability of different options to inform the way it approaches the decision. To do that it will need to be able to present realistic options to the public, including detail on the implications such as costs, risks and wider impacts. Public engagement should be woven in as a key component of testing, piloting and exploring the feasibility of different policy options.

Public engagement processes need to ask participants about decisions that are genuinely open to change. Many countries, including the UK, have now agreed their overall approach to climate change by setting long-term net zero targets along with their nearer-term nationally determined contributions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process (although there remains debate about sectoral and local targets). Engaging the public on questions that are already decided is damaging to public trust. Unless long-term climate change targets come back into question, future public engagement must focus on how the UK should reach its targets.

### **3. How can public engagement deliver most value?**

Previous public engagement processes offer many lessons about how to enable public input to policy design. Policy makers should look to learn from successes – and failures – in thinking about how to engage the public on net zero.

#### **The method needs to fit the brief**

There is a wide range of different engagement methods. None of these methods is intrinsically better than any of the others; what is important is to pick the right method to fit a particular brief. A citizens' assembly was the right choice for the UK parliament when it commissioned Climate Assembly UK because it wanted to understand the

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population's preferences on the complex trade-offs needed to reach net zero. A method that brought together a representative sample of the population, and gave them a chance to learn about the issues before reaching decisions, therefore worked well.

Other methods would be more appropriate when the aim is building trust within a community. For example, the Cycles of Resilience project seeks to bring communities in Canarsie (a coastal district in Brooklyn, New York) together with scientists and members of local government. Its aim is to look at topics including ecological wellbeing, public access to the water and disaster readiness. The project recognised the need to build relationships before discussing solutions; various exercises, including boat trips and interactive games, were designed to achieve this before moving on to prioritise actions.<sup>33</sup> In some cases, working with communities to transition to net zero will require this sort of trust building, to enable stakeholders and the public to work together to create change.

Government departments do not need to decide themselves which method, or combination of methods, best matches their brief. Indeed, it is often better for tenders to set out the brief (see Table 1 for questions to think through) and to let experts advise on which methods would work best. Subject specialists should also be involved to ensure the brief fully encompasses the issues a policy is trying to solve. External specialists from the third sector or commercial suppliers will bring with them considerable expertise and learning about what methods are suitable, and when and how to deliver them.



Table 1 Checklist for planning public engagement

Area	Questions to consider include
<b>Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the (internal and external) context in which the engagement is taking place? Is there anything important here to note?</li> </ul>
<b>Scope</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which parts of policies or decisions are open to change and which are not?</li> <li>• What level of influence are you offering the public? Are you asking them to provide advice or to make a decision? Do you want them to choose between options or work with you/others to co-create a solution?</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose, outcomes and outputs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you want to know from the public (for example, about their preferences, experiences, aspirations or ideas)?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– If you could summarise this as a single question, what would that question be?</li> <li>– Underneath this question, what sub-questions do you want to explore?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Is there anything else you want to achieve from the engagement (for example, building mutual understanding between different groups)?</li> <li>• What should the engagement process produce (for example, a report, photos, videos or something else)?</li> </ul>
<b>Who the engagement needs to reach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who needs to take part in order to achieve the purpose and outcomes of the engagement?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– In terms of members of the public, are factors around demographics, geography, behaviours, attitudes and/or life experience important?</li> <li>– Is the process seeking to bring different types of stakeholder together (for example, the public and stakeholders) or will any feed-in needed from stakeholder groups be obtained separately?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Who needs to be engaged around the process itself to ensure its influence (including inside government) and quality?</li> </ul>
<b>Budget and resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much budget is available for the engagement?</li> <li>• What roles will be delivered in-house and what will be externally commissioned? What capacity is available internally to perform the in-house roles and is it enough?</li> </ul>
<b>Timescales</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When are engagement results needed by in order for them to feed into the decision making process at the point when they would be most useful?</li> <li>• How much lead-in time is required for, for example, a procurement process to take place?</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional response</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will the results of the engagement feed into government decision making?</li> <li>• How will what the government does with the results be fed back to participants? How will this be done in a timely way?</li> <li>• Who else would find the results of the engagement useful? Will you make them aware of the results? If yes, how?</li> </ul>
<b>Join-up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does this engagement need to link up with any other elements of any net zero public engagement strategy, or are there ways it could support them?</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring and evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What information about the project would it be useful to collect? How are you going to do that?</li> <li>• Is the process being evaluated and, if so, how?</li> </ul>

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## Processes need to be transparent in order to build trust

Public engagement processes can cause a political backlash. Some critics have accused them of being 'undemocratic' and have raised questions about who takes part, how they are recruited and the information presented to participants.<sup>34</sup> Transparency is critical to dealing with these criticisms and establishing the legitimacy of processes.

Climate Assembly UK was a good example of how to be transparent. Like many other citizens' assemblies, it published information including:

- How participants were recruited
- Aggregated data on participants' demographics and attitudes, showing how assembly members compared to the wider population
- Who was involved in running the process, including members of its advisory and academic panels, and details of how key decisions were made
- A list of everyone who spoke at the assembly, alongside videos and transcripts of their presentations – which were also live-streamed as they were given – and copies of slides (where relevant)
- All written briefings given to assembly members
- How assembly members made decisions at the assembly
- Who funded the assembly and how much it cost.

This did not make the process immune to any criticism. For example, the Global Warming Policy Forum (GWPF), a lobby group that opposes action on climate change, accused the assembly of "manufacturing consent", including by choosing biased speakers and spoon-feeding participants with selective information.<sup>35</sup> These attacks did not appear to gain widespread currency among politicians or journalists – GWPF is a fringe outfit with a record of dubious analysis and climate denialism – yet they nevertheless show the need for those designing public engagement on climate change to ensure methods and processes are beyond reproach.

## Working with a range of stakeholders increases quality and impact

A wide range of people have a stake in any policy process, from politicians, officials, civil society organisations and academics to businesses and residents. Involving these groups in public engagement is important. External stakeholders can add valuable insights that help shape the focus of public engagement. They can also help to ensure its balance, improve perceptions of its legitimacy and integrity, reach intended audiences and achieve buy-in to, and use of, the results of the engagement.

One way to do this is through membership of advisory groups. These groups help to ensure that the engagement process and any information presented to participants are fair and balanced. Climate Assembly UK had both an advisory panel, made up of representatives from businesses, think tanks, professional associations and campaign groups,<sup>36</sup> and an academic panel of researchers who informed its plans. The Kendal

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Citizens' Jury had a steering group including the local MP, councillors, council officers and a wide range of civil society organisations. Both also involved stakeholders as speakers. Some processes see stakeholders more closely involved: in the Cycles of Resilience project and Poverty Truth Commissions described above, stakeholders join as participants in the project, helping to develop solutions; the Our Zero Selby project in North Yorkshire, which aims to create a community-led Just Transition to net zero, works with a range of stakeholders from the local community.

Some engagement processes seek to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders. The Climate Assembly UK team ran thematic briefings open to civil servants, professional bodies, campaign groups, the media and others before assembly weekends. They offered places for stakeholders to observe the assembly process in person (limited only by the size of the venue). They also ran a wide range of briefings on the assembly's recommendations, attracting more than 400 individuals from stakeholder organisations outside government as well as a similar number of civil servants. Of 166 stakeholders who responded to a recent evaluation survey, around 63% said that the assembly's recommendations on climate policy had influenced their work and thinking.<sup>37</sup> Around 78% reported that they had been influenced by the way that the assembly process engaged the public. Smaller-scale processes do not need such extensive work with stakeholders, but it is always worth considering who it is useful to engage, beyond those most closely involved.

### **Public engagement needs to be genuinely inclusive**

Public engagement processes need to be accessible to the broadest range of people. Climate Assembly UK was not unusual among national-level processes for offering step-free access and fully accessible accommodation, covering childcare and respite care costs, paying travel upfront where needed and funding carers to attend with participants, among other measures. It was also able to meet the needs of people with visual and hearing impairments, people who needed materials in different formats and people who required translators. The fully online Scottish Climate Assembly offered hardware and digital skills training to assembly members. In most large processes, participants' costs are covered, and their time is paid for at a rate roughly equivalent to the living wage. This reflects the time and effort given, attracts a wider range of people to take part and makes it possible for more people to engage.

Facilitation is also important. Unlike the Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, processes in the UK tend to see a facilitator work with each small group of participants. They ensure that no one dominates the conversation and encourage quieter participants to express their views. They help ensure that participants follow the conversation guidelines they set for themselves,\* treating each other with respect. Evaluations and feedback from citizens' assemblies, including the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, suggest that these approaches work well in ensuring people feel able to put across their views and that conversations are constructive and respectful even where people disagree.<sup>38</sup>

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\* It is good practice to get participants to write and agree conversation guidelines at the start of engagement processes.

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Good practice also includes ensuring that speakers proactively raise relevant inequalities, for example, those relating to race or income. It is also important to consider the diversity of those who are planning engagement processes, those on advisory groups and those who are speaking and facilitating. Advisory groups can benefit from including those who have a track record of working with and representing groups whose interests risk going unheard. Throughout the whole process of engaging the public, the commissioner needs to be alive to the need to ensure minority groups feel, and are, able to make their views known and have them taken as seriously as those of other participants. This can be achieved by oversampling from minority groups, or by running mixed-method processes to ensure all groups' needs are met. There is existing good practice for government to learn from. For example, the work of groups including the Poverty Truth Network, the Scottish Learning Disabilities Observatory (SLDO) and Talking Mats\* shows the benefits of taking time at the start of projects to build relationships and confidence, and of creating dedicated, safe spaces for people to take part.

### **Mixed methods can bring benefits**

One distinction between types of public engagement is between deliberative and participatory methods.

*Deliberative* methods focus on the quality of discourse between participants. They bring together relatively small groups of people, from 15 people at a small citizens' jury, to 50–250 people at a citizens' assembly, to 1,000 people at a deliberative poll. Participants learn about the issue in question, collectively weigh up different options and agree recommendations. Climate Assembly UK brought together 108 assembly members aged 16 and over, chosen to be representative of the wider UK population. The aspects of diversity taken into account were age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, where in the UK they lived, whether they lived in an urban or rural area and how concerned they were, if at all, about climate change. The assembly members heard from a total of 48 speakers with a wide range of views about how the UK should reach net zero emissions, and questioned them in depth. They then discussed the evidence and their own values, feelings, preferences and needs with one another. Finally, they voted on recommendations expressing their views on what a future net zero UK should be like (engaging with the trade-offs facing decision makers) and how it should get there.

In contrast, *participatory* methods focus on wider opportunities for involvement. They do not necessarily bring people together, and include methods such as crowdsourcing and surveys, as well as more innovative tools such as the 2050 Pathways Calculator mentioned earlier in this paper. The calculator was part of a three-strand public engagement programme commissioned by the Department of Energy and Climate Change through Sciencewise. In relation to meeting the UK's climate targets, it aimed to enable people to "understand the scale of the challenge, the trade-offs involved, explore and test their own preferred solutions, and translate these into action in their own lives and communities".<sup>39</sup> It was used with more than 10,000 individual members

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\* Talking Mats is a social enterprise dedicated to supporting people who experience communication barriers.

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of the public, and to inform three deliberative dialogues with stakeholders. The participants' chosen pathways were used to inform government decision making.<sup>40</sup> Other examples of participatory methods include the Your Priorities crowdsourcing platform – most famously used in Reykjavik<sup>41</sup> but also in the UK in locations including Argyll and Bute – and participatory budgeting. Green participatory budgeting has now been used in more than 15 cities worldwide, including Cuenca (Ecuador), Lisbon (Portugal), Montreal (Canada), New Taipei City (Taiwan) and Pemba (Mozambique).<sup>42</sup> In Lisbon it involves crowdsourcing ideas online and through community meetings, and a technical assessment of proposals by officials to narrow down ideas to a shortlist and then a public vote.<sup>43</sup> It can be a way to unlock a sense of agency in communities, uncover innovative ideas and be responsive to local needs.

Some participatory methods tend to allow wider engagement than deliberative processes. The trade-off can be that participants are self-selecting and not representative of the wider population, although this is not always the case. Participatory processes also tend to provide less opportunity for participants to learn about the issue and, particularly, to build an understanding of each other's perspectives. Depending on the aim of the engagement, this may or may not be a problem.

The complementary advantages and disadvantages of deliberative and participatory methods have led to some countries and areas adopting a mixed-method approach. For example, the Bristol Citizens' Assembly was preceded by a survey and focus groups to help identify issues for the assembly to consider. The Camden Citizens' Assembly followed engagement to collect ideas for action from local schools, local businesses and via the council's Commonplace platform. At a national level, the Irish Citizens' Assembly issued open calls for submissions. On abortion it received more than 1,000 submissions from "members of the public, advocacy/interest groups and other representative organisations".<sup>44</sup>

Others have developed ways to try to give larger numbers of people the chance to deliberate on issues, in lesser or greater depth. Text, Talk, Engage is a platform managed by Public Agenda. It works by facilitating "text-enabled, small group conversations that happen in many places on a single day".<sup>45</sup> Participants work in groups of three or four. They text 'start' to a pre-assigned code and then receive a series of text messages containing resources such as the discussion questions, polls that can be answered from their phones and requests to respond with ideas for action. Processes are currently designed to take around an hour, although it is up to participants how quickly or slowly they go through them.<sup>46</sup> Professor James Fishkin's team at Stanford University are currently testing a platform that aims to expand the number of people who can take part in longer, more formal deliberative processes online by offering automated facilitation of small group discussions. The platform is likely to have some limitations compared to human facilitation, and there would still be costs of participant honoraria (depending on the processes' desired reach), but it is an interesting development. Advancing technology for participation may open up new possibilities for government and others around engagement on net zero, including, for example, hybrid online and in-person activities.

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## 4. How should the government equip itself to engage the public on net zero?

The government needs an overarching strategy for public engagement on net zero. That strategy should recognise that the UK government is not the only actor that needs to engage the public on climate change. A successful transition will also require public engagement from local government, public bodies, academics, businesses, community groups and others – and the strategy will need to take account of the government’s role within this wider context. It will need to consider how the government will build on work from, collaborate with and facilitate engagement by others.

It also needs to address issues around roles and capabilities for public engagement. To deliver the strategy, departments and public bodies will need the ability to plan and commission specific public engagement processes. Those in government will need to think about the roles to which they are best suited, and where they should bring in external expertise. They should also draw on the lessons from public engagement held in the UK and abroad on climate and other policy issues about how to make public engagement a success.

### **The government needs to take a strategic approach to public engagement**

Public engagement on climate change to date has largely taken the form of one-off processes commissioned without reference to one another. The Climate Change Committee has called on the government to move beyond this and establish a more strategic approach to identifying where and how it needs to engage the public. To do this, the government needs a net zero public engagement strategy that covers engagement by sector, engagement on cross-cutting issues and engagement with groups most likely to be under-represented in decision making and potentially vulnerable to climate change.

At a roundtable convened by the Institute for Government and Involve, participants identified sectoral engagement as a key priority. Central government departments are responsible for the net zero transition in key sectors – including energy, transport, housing and agriculture. Climate Assembly UK identified high-level issues, but it covered a wide range of topics. Further engagement will be needed to explore specific issues in a more thorough way. This is particularly true of sectors where changes will have the greatest impact on people’s lives.

Cross-cutting engagement will also be needed. Sectoral plans will need to be joined up because the impacts on people’s lives will not be felt in isolation. Net zero will have cumulative impacts; for example, people may need to change the way they both travel and heat their home over the coming decade. Some will see their jobs changing, and policy makers will need to consider what will constitute a ‘just transition’ for different sectors and communities. Understanding these layered effects will be important to sequencing changes and building public support, and is likely to require dedicated public engagement work.



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For both sectoral and cross-cutting engagement, policy makers will need to take tailored steps to engage groups who are often under-represented in policy making; for example, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, people with learning disabilities, people with poor mental health and people in lower income deciles. Policy makers may wish to do this through centrally co-ordinated partnerships with organisations that already hold trusted relationships with potential participants and know how to create engagement opportunities that work for them – such as the Poverty Truth Network. Such a tailored approach will be important in addressing public concern that the transition to net zero needs to be fair and not exacerbate existing inequalities or create new ones.

### **The government needs to strengthen its capability for co-ordinating public engagement**

A plan for public engagement on net zero will require central co-ordination. Previous Institute for Government work has argued that current co-ordination of net zero, led by BEIS, is too weak, and there is a need for a central net zero unit in the Cabinet Office to develop and oversee strategy.<sup>47</sup> Such a unit would be a natural place to develop an overarching net zero public engagement strategy and co-ordinate its delivery, but the government appears set to continue with its existing approach. If BEIS continues to oversee net zero, it should also have responsibility for strategy, co-ordination and capability building on public engagement.

There are several important co-ordination roles. First, most policy areas will require several departments and external experts to work together to engage the public – and effective co-ordination will be needed to achieve this. On housing retrofit, for example, the business department (which has overall policy responsibility) would need to consult with the Treasury (which controls any possible fiscal incentives), the housing department (which oversees building standards/inspections), local authorities (which manage social housing, inspect buildings and control the planning system), energy suppliers and others.

Second, the outputs of engagement processes need to be made widely available to policy makers across government and beyond. The co-ordination team should collate the results of engagement from central and local government, and external bodies, and ensure departments and external organisations can access them. This would help to ensure that officials (and others) do not repeat engagement already undertaken.

Third, as departments build their understanding of what works with public engagement on net zero, the BEIS team should ensure those lessons are shared across government. The team should develop a set of standards for public engagement, as a means of both guidance and quality assurance. It should also act as a central point of expertise on the commissioning, design and delivery of public engagement.



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## Departments should involve external experts in planning public engagement

Public engagement does not only require better co-ordination within government; departments will also need to involve a diverse range of external experts. In few, if any, sectors does reaching net zero just require action from government. Businesses, the public sector, civil society organisations, academics and others all have key roles to play.

It is considered standard good practice to involve external experts in planning individual public engagement processes, not least through advisory panels, as already outlined. Developing a public engagement strategy involves engaging external experts a stage earlier, in determining what engagement needs to be commissioned. For example, to think through public engagement needs and priorities around heat decarbonisation, government would need to convene a wide range of groups, including homeowners, landlords, tenants, housing associations, representatives of builders and manufacturers, academics and other experts.

Departments will need to plan for how they will do this. Not all departments have strong connections with external expertise. For example, a recent Institute for Government report found that while BEIS has strong in-house analytical capability, it struggles to bring in views from outside.<sup>48</sup> Some departments also lack experience with public engagement and involving external voices in decision making.

The government could look to the Climate Change Committee for support to identify where and how public engagement is needed, convening civil servants and external stakeholders to inform its work. This could become part of the advice the committee gives on how government develops credible policies to reduce emissions to meet its targets, given those policies will need public support. The committee may be well placed to help, given it has strong connections with government, sectoral experts and other bodies. It has indicated in its latest advice that it would be happy to play such a role.<sup>49</sup>

External experts involved in planning what engagement is needed could go on to contribute to individual engagement processes; for example, through advisory panels.

## Departments should commission engagement but not necessarily deliver it

Departments will need to commission their own public engagement, as well as drawing on the engagement conducted by others. They will need to develop strong relationships with external contractors, either third sector or commercial suppliers, who already have considerable expertise in running public engagement processes.

There are a small number of examples of this happening already. Sciencewise is a public engagement programme focusing on science and technology and managed by Involve, which helps decision makers to formulate policy with a deeper understanding of the public's views, concerns and aspirations. Funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and supported by BEIS, it pairs policy makers with a dialogue and engagement specialist from an external contractor who mentors them from the point of their initial

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idea, through deciding what public engagement to commission, the commissioning process and managing delivery and impact. All Sciencewise engagement processes are expected to follow a set of principles to ensure high-quality engagement.

In some cases, it may be helpful for processes to be commissioned and run at arm's length from government. Experts involved in planning engagement work may be able to take on co-commissioning and delivery of some of the engagement needed. The Climate Change Committee, for example, may find such engagement useful to inform its own recommendations to government. Climate Assembly UK also arguably benefited in some ways from being commissioned by parliament rather than government in that it was able to present itself as an independent exercise.

### **Government will need more capability on public engagement**

The skills necessary for effective public engagement – such as developing strategy, planning and commissioning – and are not readily available in government.

There are precedents. For example, Future Focus was an internal unit within a predecessor to BEIS that provided design and facilitation support to civil servants across government around internal and stakeholder engagement. But capacity – both in departments and in any central co-ordinating department – has declined.

The central importance of public engagement to achieving net zero provides government with an opportunity to address these gaps and build capability, which could then also be applied more widely to other policy areas, such as 'levelling up'.

While departments will want to draw on expertise held externally, there is a strong case for government investing in strengthening internal capacity too. It is unlikely that government will be able to identify its needs and be an 'intelligent customer' if it lacks a solid grounding in public engagement itself.

### **Local government has a critical role in engaging the public on net zero**

While much decision making power lies with the UK government and national engagement is therefore vital, local areas will need to determine their own paths to net zero within a broad national framework. They will need to decide how to implement policies decided at the centre of government so that they work for their area (as individual policies and as a whole), as well as looking at what they can do using their own powers.

In many cases, the public may find engaging on issues at the local level more tangible. Local government and civil society organisations are also well placed to reach the diversity of their local populations. Climate Assembly UK has emphasised the importance of "local community engagement... embedded in national solutions".<sup>50</sup>

Central government will need to consider how to support and work with those trying to deliver net zero at the local level. The first step is for government to make clear how local action fits into the overall net zero strategy. The Climate Change Committee has

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advised the government to include a net zero delivery framework in its net zero strategy “that will align and clarify national, sub-national, regional and local delivery roles and areas for collaboration”.<sup>51</sup>

The government may also be able to provide funding, support and guidance. The recent Innovation in Democracy Programme, established by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, provided funding and public engagement expertise to three local areas to involve the public in their decision making. The government could consider whether a lighter-touch fund could provide support to a much greater number of local authorities and/or service providers, community groups, businesses and others at a local level wishing to engage the public in their decisions.

### **Public engagement needs to be embedded in the net zero strategy**

The government’s net zero strategy, which is due in the autumn of this year, should state its intention to enable active public participation in policy design as part of its approach to achieving net zero. It should outline the role the government sees this – and other – types of public engagement playing, and its approach to how they will join up and be co-ordinated to maximise their mutual impact. It should also set out the government’s overarching aims and objectives for public engagement on net zero.

The strategy should build on the points raised in this paper. It should set out the government’s intention to use active public participation in policy design to achieve changes by sector, navigate cross-cutting issues, and involve those most likely to be under-represented in decision making and potentially vulnerable to climate change. It should outline who will play the different roles described in this section of the paper and its approach to building public engagement capability.

Finally, it should ensure it makes an explicit budget available for posts, skills development and external commissioning. These costs will be dwarfed by the costs of the transition to net zero – costs that will only rise if policy fails due to a lack of public support, poor take-up or bad design. There are many examples already of such false starts in the recent past and the government needs to invest in ensuring they are avoided in the future.

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Tom is an associate director at the Institute for Government. His research has covered government outsourcing, civil service reform and policy making, including recent work on net zero and the coronavirus crisis. He also delivers the Institute's training programme on how government works.

Previously, Tom worked at the Open Data Institute, where he advised governments and businesses on data policy, and the think tank Reform, where he researched health and criminal justice.

### Sarah Allen

Sarah is director of capacity building and standards at Involve, a public engagement charity. Her role focuses on building the capacity of public servants and practitioners, and developing the body of evidence, principles and standards that support participatory and deliberative practice. Sarah joined Involve as engagement lead in 2014, becoming head of engagement in November 2017, and director of capacity building and standards in April 2021. Her work at Involve has included a number of high-profile citizens' assemblies, including Climate Assembly UK (UK parliament, 2019–20), the National Assembly for Wales' Citizens' Assembly (2019) and the Citizens' Assembly on Social Care (UK parliament, 2018). She was design and facilitation lead for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit (2017). Sarah is an honorary senior research fellow at the Constitution Unit, University College London, and an associate member of the University of Leeds' Centre for Democratic Engagement. She was a member of the Wellcome Trust's working group on patient engagement.

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**September 2021**

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