



**POLITICAL
INTELLIGENCE**

Obstacles to Net Zero

Social



Introduction

World leaders have not done enough to deliver on their [Glasgow Climate Pact](#) commitments. That was the frank assessment of Alok Sharma, the UK's COP26 President, at an event in May to mark six months since almost 200 nations signed the agreement at the UN Climate Change Conference. He acknowledged the world had changed since he had fought back tears and apologised after a late amendment on coal was added to the COP26 deal. War has returned to Europe, inflation is spiking, debt is mounting, energy prices are rising, and people are struggling to feed their families as the world continues to deal with the shock of the Covid pandemic, he said. "[But frankly we need to up the pace](#)," he added. When countries meet in November at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt, they must show a global audience, "that though the world has changed, our resolve has not."

Hosting COP26 helped spur the UK government to try and lead by example on climate change policy. The government's [Net Zero Strategy](#)—published just before the UN conference—set out the UK's ambition to reach net zero emissions by 2050. Since then, the focus has inevitably shifted to how the climate targets will be met. "It is easy for the government to have the rhetoric and goals of achieving net zero, yet this cannot be done without making hard choices," Lord John Krebs, Professor of Zoology at Oxford University and an active participant in the Environment Act passing through the House of Lords, told Dods Political Intelligence.

To shed light on the challenges the government faces in delivering its climate change policy, Dods Political Intelligence has produced four short reports, each exploring a key obstacle to net zero: economic and financial, regulatory, technological, and social. The final report also includes a case study of how these challenges are playing out in the drive to green the NHS, the world's first national health service to commit to reaching net zero.

This fourth report in the Obstacles to Net Zero series explores some of the social challenges to reaching net zero, including behavioral change and ensuring a just transition. It also includes a case study examining the National Health Service's efforts to reach net zero, which is illustrative of many of the challenges described in this series of reports.

Report by Alexandra Ming, Michael Thorogood, Helen Hill, Dr Joshua Wells and Catherine Fredette





Behavioural Change

If there is no will, there is simply no way the UK will meet its climate change goals. The Climate Change Committee's (CCC) [2021 progress report to parliament](#) said behavioural change and demand management were key for the government to achieve net zero. The government's climate change adviser recommended that change would be required from people as "consumers, workers, households, businesses and citizens". Research from the CCC has indicated that more than half of the emissions reductions needed to meet the Sixth Carbon Budget necessitated making low-carbon choices, whether this was adopting new technologies or changing consumption patterns. Increasing public engagement was a key priority for the government, it said, adding that there was a need to promote less carbon-intensive options for diet and transport in particular

In response, Lord Martin Callanan, the Minister for Business, Energy and Corporate Responsibility, [said](#) the government's Net Zero Strategy would set out how the government would encourage and support the public to make green choices. However, much of the strategy's green commitments focused on the adoption of new technologies, raising awareness, and setting regulatory signals rather than asking the public to make lifestyle adjustments. The government's net zero rhetoric has also framed climate change primarily as an opportunity for businesses to develop and sell green products—from electric vehicles, to heat pumps, and green financial products-- and create thousands of new green jobs.

The CCC's [assessment of the Net Zero Strategy](#) published in October 2021 praised the government for setting out for the first time how it intended to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050 but it also identified some gaps in implementation, including on public engagement where the CCC offered it's support. It also said there was a lack of emphasis on demand management for high carbon activities and recommended the government explore early action on encouraging diet change, reductions in aviation and travel demand.

Questions have been raised about whether the government has effectively communicated its climate change goals to the public, and how people can help achieve them. Surveys have shown [that although more than three quarters](#) of the British public are concerned or very concerned by climate change and also recognise their lifestyles must change to mitigate its impacts, there is a lack of knowledge about which changes are most beneficial. Polling conducted by Ipsos ahead of COP26 [found](#) that only 20 percent of respondents felt they had a good understanding of the government's net zero commitments. Moreover, in a [global survey](#) undertaken by Ipsos on Earth Day, only 28 percent of Britons interviewed said that the UK government had a clear plan for how people, businesses and government would work together to tackle climate change, three percentage points lower than the global average. Kelly Beaver, managing director of Ipsos Public Affairs, said that the survey showed there was a lack of awareness of how the government planned to bring all groups in society together to tackle climate change. "Although many Britons say they understand what actions they need to take to tackle climate change, they tend to focus on lower impact actions rather than more significant lifestyle changes," she said.

The same polling found that the public were more likely to be in favour of the government implementing policies that incentivised or encouraged action financially or supported actions that were already embedded in their lifestyle. Of the actions surveyed, the most popular action for the government to take was encouraging households to recycle more (87 percent net support). However, in a sign that there remains resistance to certain greener behaviours, the

two policies with the least support--which the CCC has suggested that the government should explore--were encouraging people to eat less meat and dairy products (13 percent net support) and take fewer flights (24 percent net support).

Surveys in recent years have suggested many people already feel they are doing their fair share to tackle climate change, and the onus was on government and industry to take more clear action. A survey by [Kantar in 2021](#) to coincide with COP26 found that although British people were alarmed by the climate crisis, most believed they were already doing more to preserve the planet than the government and corporations. Emmanuel Rivière, director of international polling at Kantar Public, said the survey suggested governments had to measure up to public expectations before trying to persuade people about the solutions to the climate crisis.

Experts also suggest people's preference for recycling over taking fewer flights may also be due to a miscalculation of which climate change behaviours are most effective. According to the [Institute of Physics](#), the top three ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are having one fewer child, not having a car and avoiding a long-distance flight. By contrast, Britons [identify](#) recycling as much as possible (55 percent), buying energy from renewable sources (45 percent) and replacing a typical car with an electric or hybrid vehicle (39 percent) as the most effective. Tackling the gaps between perceived efficacy and actual impact will be key for the government to ensure the government can bring the public onside in achieving net zero.

Ensuring a just transition

The Covid pandemic has highlighted how global crises can expose and reinforce existing inequalities, both between and within countries. Climate change presents a similar challenge for policymakers. In its [Sixth Carbon Budget](#) report, the CCC said that fairness was fundamental to public support for climate change measures, which includes shielding the most vulnerable from the costs of the transition and ensuring the benefits are widely shared.

The government has sought to align the geography of the net zero transition with its levelling-up agenda, focusing the development of new green industries on less prosperous communities and those set to be impacted most from the transition, such as those reliant on carbon-intensive production. For example, the Tees Valley has become a focal point for new green industries, with a [new Teesside Freeport](#) that aims to create more than 18,000 new highly skilled jobs, generate £3.2bn for local communities and transform the region into a clean energy powerhouse.

However, some stakeholders argue that the government needs to move further and faster. The Scottish government, for example, has committed to leading the production of [key just transition plans](#) that engage communities, businesses and those most likely to be impacted by the transition. It has also convened a Just Transition Commission to provide expert advice and engage with impacted communities, while a dedicated Minister for Just Transition will ensure fairness is embedded across government policy. Some stakeholders argue this is something the UK government needs to mirror. The 368-page Net Zero Strategy mentions the words "just transition" only once and that is in relation to the work of the Scottish government.

There are numerous challenges to ensuring that the net zero transition is fair. As we explain in the report in this series which examines some of the economic obstacles to reaching net zero, the process will be very expensive. That raises the challenge of making sure that the costs are borne in an equitable manner, with adequate funding to support consumers that are less able



to switch to greener heat technologies or home energy efficiency improvements, especially during the cost-of-living crisis. The CCC has estimated that up to £7bn of additional Exchequer funding is needed each year by 2030 to deliver the low-carbon solutions necessary for industrial decarbonisation and to retrofit homes without raising household energy bills.

As natural hazards exacerbated by climate change such as flooding and storms increase in frequency and intensity, investment will also be [needed](#) to ensure equitable climate resilience and adaptation, especially for less wealthy areas and those most exposed to climate risks. Green industries will also require training for new green jobs and for workers in carbon-intensive sectors to be retrained as polluting energies and production methods are phased out. There is an infrastructure dimension to the just transition as well. The planned ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans from 2030 means consumers across the country will require accessible electric vehicle charging points.

Green groups and others have called for the creation of citizen assemblies where a cross-section of society can gather to discuss these challenges and offer recommendations. Some local authorities, such as Oxford City Council, have already [tried](#) such forums. A national Citizens' Assembly was also convened in 2019 by six House of Commons select committees. Its final report [emphasised](#) the need for improved information and education; fairness across geographies and demographics; and choice for individuals and local areas, stressing the need for a local approach to empower communities. The Carbon Trust, which advises businesses, governments and the public sector on climate change solutions, [said](#) "There is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to equitably distributing costs and benefits of a transition."

Case Study: Greening the NHS

In October 2020, the National Health Service committed to becoming the world's first [net zero health service](#), based on an understanding of how human health and climate change are inextricably linked. Its huge scale and diversity of operations makes it a prime example of many of the obstacles for achieving net zero. The NHS is directly responsible for about 4 percent of the UK's carbon emissions and is also the UK's largest employer. As a state-run organisation, it also has the added importance as a high-profile test of the government's ability and commitment to manage and lead the green transition. While much of the discussion around net zero tends to focus on companies with a direct interest in energy—such as oil and gas companies—the UK will only achieve net zero if businesses across all sectors in the economy are able to pull their weight and deliver on climate change commitments.

"It is not enough for the NHS to treat the problems caused by air pollution and climate change – from asthma to heart attacks and strokes – we need to play our part in tackling them at source...If [this country is to succeed in its overarching climate goals the NHS has to be a major part of the solution.](#)" Simon Stevens, former chief executive of the NHS, [said](#) when the service committed to going net zero.

The NHS set itself two goals in its "Delivering a 'Net Zero' National Health Service" [plan](#): reach net zero in the emissions it produces directly (the so-called NHS carbon footprint) by 2040, with an intermediate target of an 80 percent cut by 2028-32; and reach net zero for the emissions it can influence (the so-called NHS carbon footprint plus) by 2045, including an 80 percent cut by 2036 to 2039.

The diversity of NHS operations suggest the NHS Greener plan will require decarbonizing efforts on multiple fronts. That includes greening the energy used for essential power and heating in hospitals and other facilities, but also finding environmentally friendly options for ambulances and other emergency transport and delivery services, building infrastructure, waste disposal, and large-scale procurement. It is unclear how much progress the NHS has made in reaching its twin climate goals since they were announced. It has set up a “systems progress” website page, which says the system met and exceeded the 2020 targets outlined in the Climate Act, which commits the government to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100 percent of 1990 levels by 2050. The page invites users to share their greener NHS case studies, which include a plan to reduce unnecessary cannulation at Charing Cross Hospital to support a plan to cut the use of clinical single-use plastics by 10 percent in the short term; and using cycle couriers to transport chemotherapy drugs in Oxford to support a wider drive to use cleaner transport solutions. Around 4 percent, or 9.5 billion miles, of all road transport in England relates to the NHS, contributing around 14 percent of the system’s emissions, according to NHS figures.

Rather like the government, the NHS faces the challenge of trying to encourage firms that provide it with services to also go green as 60 percent of its overall carbon footprint is based within its supply chain. The system uses [over 80,000 suppliers](#) covering a huge range of goods including pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, food, and business and office goods. One part of the puzzle relates to the government’s [Procurement Policy Note 06/21](#) (PPN 06/21), which provides guidance and best practice on public sector procurement. The note was published in June 2021 following the UK’s legal commitment to achieve net zero by 2050, and the subsequent development of complementary commercial policy measures for central government departments and arms-length bodies. These organisations are now required to ensure that suppliers bidding for major government contracts commit to achieving net zero by 2050 and to publishing a ‘Carbon Reduction Plan’.

For the NHS, the PPN 06/21 will take effect from April 2023, and from April 2027 all suppliers with contracts for goods, services and works will be expected to publish carbon reduction plans which account for direct and indirect emissions from suppliers. From April 2028, a requirement will be introduced overseeing the provision of carbon foot-printing for individual products supplied to the NHS. From 2030, suppliers will only be able to qualify for NHS contracts if they can demonstrate their progress continue carbon emissions reporting through the supplier framework. Putting this plan into action will take considerable time and funding. From a regulatory and behavioral perspective, the PPN 06/21 and other actions will require new greener ways for the NHS to work with suppliers, including monitoring and enforcement.



About Dods Political Intelligence

We provide insight, intelligence and impact through our comprehensive suite of policy tools. Our services comprise of three main elements: *Dods Consultancy* – based in Brussels and London, our industry experts offer real-time analysis and impartial guidance on the latest policy developments and trends. *Dods Monitoring* – our platform offers instant alerts and contextual insight from over 13,000 sources across the UK and the EU. *Dods People* – the original who is who in politics, Dods Parliamentary Companion, was established in 1832. Today, our stakeholder management tools cover the UK and the EU, helping you identify and communicate effectively with key contacts.

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