



**NATIONAL INDICATOR (NI) 188:
YEAR 1 REVIEW AND ANALYSIS**

Executive Summary

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction, aims and methodology

1. National Indicator (NI) 188 Planning to Adapt to Climate Change measures the preparedness of local authorities in embedding the assessment of climate risks and opportunities in their council services and plans with their local strategic partners. Progress of the authority is measured against five levels (0-4). To achieve each level, the authority has to be able to demonstrate sufficient evidence of progress against each part of the level statement. The indicator has been in operation since April 2008 and all local authorities – whether or not they have adopted the indicator in their Local Area Agreements (LAAs) – were required to report their achievements up to 31 March 2009 through a self-assessment approach.

2. This study was carried out to:

- understand the complexities and issues of adaptation in local government during year 1 of NI 188
- assess the appropriateness of the self-assessment matrix (format and reporting process)
- gauge the level of senior local government and political engagement with NI 188
- help identify examples of good practice across England
- recommend any future changes to the reporting process and future development of the indicator

3. The study was carried out in three phases:

- an initial analysis of all NI 188 self-assessment matrices received by Defra (around 200) and data on levels of achievement submitted by local authorities to the CLG Hub
- a detailed analysis of a subsample of 45 matrices (five per Government Office (GO) region, including London)
- in-depth telephone interviews with 10 local authority representatives from a range of GO regions.

Key findings

Analysis of CLG Hub Data

4. In view of the newness of the indicator, it is not surprising that around half (51%) of local authorities assessed themselves at Level 0, with 43% assessing themselves at Level 1 and only 6% considering themselves at Level 2. Only one authority, Stockton on Tees Borough Council (BC), assessed itself at Level 3. Level 1 was most common in Eastern region, East Midlands and the South West. It is clear that local government reorganisation (e.g. in Bedfordshire and Cheshire), had a negative impact on the ability of some authorities to make progress on this indicator. However, it should be acknowledged that many local authorities, even those at Level 0, had taken significant steps forward in planning to adapt to climate change over the first year of indicator.

5. A higher proportion assessed themselves as Level 1 (66%) in the 56 authority areas/LSPs that included NI 188 in their Local Area Agreement (LAA), with only 25% at Level 0, four (7%) at Level 2 and one (2%) at Level 3. Of these, around 82% met or exceeded their target levels for Year 1.

Analysis of self-assessment matrices

6. Overall, it appears that the levels of achievement submitted by the majority of local authorities are broadly supported by the evidence of activities provided.

7. However, there were significant differences in the approach taken to completing the self-assessment matrix by local authorities/LSPs, with some providing little or no supporting evidence and others supplying extensive evidence, not only to justify selecting the evidence types listed but also to show the additional activities that had been taken.

8. In addition, two different approaches were taken by local authorities/LSPs in selecting the level of achievement for NI 188. Most local authorities chose the level at which they had carried out all relevant activities. However, some appeared to consider that if the majority – *but not all* – of the activities had been adequately addressed at a particular level, then they should assess themselves at that level. This was a significant concern for some telephone interviewees.

9. Some authorities did not appear to be considering climate change adaptation broadly enough. In particular, while flooding was clearly a major risk for some authorities, it was perhaps surprising that more local authorities in the South East and East did not highlight drought and excessive heat as other potential risks. In addition, biodiversity was rarely mentioned, despite public bodies being legally responsible for its protection. This may be partly because most authorities were still at Levels 0 and 1 and they had not yet carried out a comprehensive risk-based assessment which would highlight other significant risks. Exceptions to this include Hertfordshire County Council (CC), with its consideration of risks to vulnerable groups from excessive heat, and Cornwall CC, with its work on climate impacts on biodiversity.

10. A range of different approaches were being taken by authorities to carrying out a local risk-based assessment (Criterion 1b) and there seemed some confusion about what was required, a point that was also raised by several interviewees. Thus, while the Local Climate Impacts Profile (LCLIP) was used frequently as a means of assessing the significant vulnerabilities and opportunities to weather and climate, a range of other approaches were being used such as meetings and workshops, and it was not always clear from responses how the assessment had been carried out.

11. Some authorities did not appear to be adequately considering future changes in the severity and intensity of weather impacts due to climate change. While many mentioned work being carried out to identify current weather impacts on services, fewer authorities specifically mentioned how these impacts would change over time (e.g. using UKCP09 projections) and how these would be addressed (e.g. through the Business Areas Climate Impacts Assessment Tool – BACLIAT). Examples of authorities that clearly demonstrated they were considering future impacts include Leeds City Council, Oxford City Council and Sutton BC.

12. Several councils focusing on flood risk appeared to be reporting business as usual arrangements. Thus, although they mentioned the important role currently being played by Local Resilience Forums' Community Risk Registers in emergency planning, they did not indicate how this work would need to specifically address climate change adaptation. Exceptions to this include Sunderland City Council and Warrington BC among others.

13. To-date, most authorities have focused more on likely significant vulnerabilities to weather and climate than on any opportunities that may arise. This is understandable because it is likely that, in most areas, the vulnerabilities will outweigh the opportunities. In addition, risk assessment and management are already embedded in local authorities' day-to-day operations. Exceptions to this include Bournemouth BC and Torbay Council.

14. Although most authorities have made public commitments to identify and manage climate related risk (Criterion 1a), few authorities (e.g. Sunderland City Council) appear to have embarked on any additional awareness raising with the general public on climate change adaptation issues, even in areas where flooding is already a major issue.

15. The importance of authorities working together at a county or even GO level and of CCs taking a lead role in the relationship with DCs was highlighted by several two tier authorities such as Hampshire, Lancashire and several in the East Midlands. Not only did this avoid duplication of effort, but it allowed them to share knowledge, best practice and resources. This was important as it was clear that the lack of resources for some authorities, particularly small district councils, was a major limiting factor in moving from Level 0 to Level 1. Those authorities working closely with neighbouring councils were already more successful in moving the agenda forward than those operating in isolation, particularly at the district level.

16. Few authorities appeared to have carried out activities in support of the supplementary aims set out in NI 188 Guidance Notes produced by the Local and Regional Partnership Board (LRAP). Exceptions include Essex CC, some Suffolk councils and Telford and Wrekin Council that have set up weather databases to record information on past weather events and their impacts, if any, on services.

17. As indicated above, analysis of the self-assessment matrices showed that there were many examples of good practice by local authorities and LSPs in planning adapting to climate change. Other examples of good practice are highlighted in Annex E.

Telephone interviews

Governance structure and partnership working

18. Most authorities were approaching adaptation as a partnership and found this to be hugely beneficial in terms of sharing knowledge, best practice and resources and in avoiding duplication of effort. This partnership approach did not come across as strongly in the self-assessment matrices, although the partnerships described by interviewees covered those with other councils as well as external partners. Links between CCs and BCs/DCs in two tier authorities were generally stronger in those areas that had adopted the indicator and in certain GO regions such as East Midlands, where there was also a regional group.

Reporting mechanism

19. All interviewees felt that the format of the self-assessment matrix was straightforward and reasonably clear to follow and several commented that completing the matrix had been a useful process in helping them to identify and back-fill gaps in the work they had already carried out at lower levels. However, most felt that a stronger steer was required on the need to justify the examples of evidence selected for each criterion. Most also found the LRAP Guidance Notes to be comprehensive and helpful.

20. All interviewees agreed that NI 188 should be a process-based indicator in the current reporting period to March 2011 due to the newness of the policy area and were in favour of the staged approach. They were also in favour of self-assessment, though they felt that some form of external scrutiny or feedback process was vital to ensure a consistent approach to reporting. One possibility could be for GOs to fulfil that function at a regional level. Another approach could be to have some form of reciprocal arrangement between authorities whereby they could validate each other's matrix.

Level of engagement of senior managers and council members and commitment to NI 188

21. The overall level of engagement of senior managers and council members was considered to be good, with some commenting that they were 'very engaged'. Adopting the indicator was felt to have made a big difference to the level of commitment shown by the authorities concerned, including the level of engagement of service heads. However, interestingly, those that had not adopted the indicator felt that this had not made any difference to their level of commitment or engagement. In some cases, this was because the local authority was already fully committed to the climate change agenda.

Barriers to climate change adaptation

22. A wide range of barriers to planning to adapt to climate change were suggested, the most common of which were lack of resources, particularly in small district councils where most did not have a dedicated climate change officer, and lack of skills, particularly among service heads and their staff. It was also felt that too much duplication of work was occurring due to the lack of a steer from Defra to local authorities/LSPs to carry out activities at the right level and, in general, too much was being expected of local authorities, with not enough being done centrally, including support by Defra. The title of the indicator was also considered to sideline it as 'environmental' issue. It was suggested that a better title might be 'continued service provision under a changing environment'.

23. Suggestions for how these barriers could be overcome included more pooling of staff resources and funds and providing more support and training, e.g. for district councils and service areas. The importance of explaining the relevance of climate change adaptation to services in terms of the duration of policies and programmes was also stressed. In addition, more central support from Defra and LRAP would be helpful.

Reporting process

24. Significant problems were encountered with the reporting arrangements, whereby authorities had to submit data on levels to the CLG Hub and send self-assessment matrices to Defra. This arrangement resulted in missing and inaccurate data. The Defra requirement for only two tier authorities that had adopted the indicator to report their level on the matrix also caused significant problems.

Future development of NI 188

25. In view of the relatively low level of preparedness in planning to adapt to climate change shown by many local authorities (over half will still be at Level 2 by March 2011), it is likely that a similar process-based indicator will continue to be more appropriate for the next reporting round (2011-2014).

26. However, it should be possible to develop outcome indicators for future reporting rounds. Issues to consider include the applicability of the indicator across all local authority areas and its linkage to specific actions taken by local authorities and the wider LSPs. The Pitt Review of the 2007 floods identified the need for more sustainable drainage across all local authority areas, which may give rise to potential local authority performance indicators, e.g. percentage of newly developed land served by sustainable drainage or adoption of surface water management plans. Other possible indicators include:

- % refurbishments/new build built to standard suitable for climate over next 50 year
- area of Grade 1 agricultural land developed in the last five years
- measurement of effectiveness of response of emergency services during a sample of climate change incidents (flood/heat wave, wild-fire and storm) in the last five years
- change in extent of semi-natural habitats
- increase in the amount of road maintenance needed

Further work is needed in this area.

Key recommendations

27. The following key recommendations are made for **Defra** to consider further:

- an alternative reporting arrangement is needed to allow local authorities to submit data on levels and self-assessment matrices to one place
- stronger guidance is needed on selecting and justifying the level of achievement of the indicator
- additional support and guidance are needed on assessing future climate impacts, in part through the LRAP Guidance Notes
- more encouragement is needed to increase the number of authorities undertaking the supplementary aims of the LRAP Guidance Notes such as setting up a weather database, which would provide useful evidence of impacts on services
- some form of light-touch external scrutiny or feedback process is necessary to ensure a consistent approach to self-assessment and reporting
- a stronger steer is needed to encourage authorities and LSPs to carry out work at county or regional level and to share data and resources regionally and between regions. Where possible, more should also be done centrally

- a more consistent approach to engagement by senior managers and council members is needed to raise the profile of the indicator among authorities
- further work is needed to develop a suitable outcome-based indicator to replace NI 188

28. The following key recommendations are made for **local authorities** to consider further:

- a partnership approach should be adopted wherever possible. Ways to increase the sharing of knowledge and best practice between regions should also be explored.
- additional training on carrying out risk-based assessments, LCLIPs, BACLIATs, etc. and using UKCP09 projections should be considered (which may require support from Defra)
- locating climate change adaptation posts in emergency planning/business continuity or more cross-cutting departments needs to be considered as a way of helping to embed the work more effectively across the council
- an awareness raising programme with the general public should be considered to increase understanding of, and support for, adaptation activities.