

Cllr Deborah Urquhart

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The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

(By email to publiccorrespondence@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

5 October 2021

Dear Mr Sharma,

Local authorities are essential to delivering long-term, sustainable emissions reductions for local places. The importance of local leadership and the need for properly resourced and funded local government was recognised in the Climate Change Committee's Sixth Carbon Budget report last December. The report identified that place is a key dimension in achieving net zero, with delivery processes needed across all levels of government.

The National Audit Office report on local government and net zero in England (July 2021) also recognises this critical importance and the need for local authorities to have the skills, resources and funding to be able to deliver effectively. We concur with the main findings of the NAO report that central government has not provided local authorities with clarity about their roles in achieving net zero, and that its approach to funding is piecemeal and short-term.

The NAO report also recognises local authorities' ability to drive and support the behavioural change within communities that is needed to reduce emissions in key areas such as transport, housing and waste. Along with the vast majority of councils, West Sussex County Council has made commitments and developed plans to decarbonise our own activities and to accelerate the decarbonisation of our local area. Despite this, the government has been slow to consult with the local government sector on responsibilities and priorities in order to better support local action.

Among the many recommendations from the Climate Change Committee's June 2021 report 'Progress in reducing emissions and Progress in adapting to climate change' was that the big cross-cutting challenges of public engagement, fair funding and local delivery must be tackled. We strongly concur.

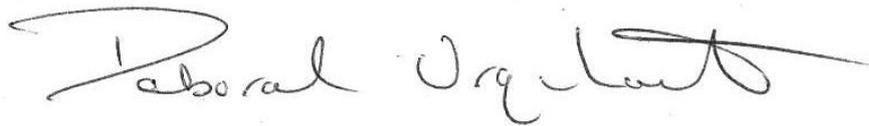
West Sussex County Council supports calls for the government to support adequate long-term funding and financing for local authorities to enable them to act confidently in the long-term best interests of their communities as they tackle the climate and ecological crises. The allocation of net zero grants should not be dependent on the vagaries and opacity of competitive bidding processes. They should move away from grant application processes (such as Salix and Active Travel Funds) that open a short window of opportunity and have short

term spending horizons. Timescales must be realistic and deliverable, giving clear signals to markets to enable supply chains to be built.

The County Council therefore also supports calls by the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) and others for a joint local and national government Task Force to plan action to reach net zero emissions. The role of such a partnership would include setting of appropriate regulations, benchmarks and targets and create the much-needed long-term funding mechanisms to enable local communities and economies to decarbonise whilst remaining resilient and sustainable.

West Sussex County Council is stepping up to the challenge of net zero and, through ADEPT and other organisations, our officers are already engaged with government, the NAO and others including the LGA in this pursuit of the common and pressing objectives we all share. If we can further support government – and any such task force or partnership - we stand ready to do so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Deborah Urquhart". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Cllr Deborah Urquhart
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change

Copy to:

Councillor James Jamieson, Chairman of the LGA

Councillor Paul Marshall, Leader of West Sussex County Council

Becky Shaw, Chief Executive of West Sussex County Council