

# CAST BRIEFING 46 - April 2026



## Helping local authorities make decisions that benefit people and the planet: Trialling an integrated assessment tool in Wales

### Key messages:

- Integrated assessment tools can help local authorities design policies that tackle climate change while delivering wider benefits in terms of health, equality and more.
- Capacity and resource issues can prevent the effective use of integrated assessment tools and may need support or backing from senior policy officials to be addressed.
- Local authorities seeking to reduce carbon emissions while delivering wider societal benefits should create teams of trained 'climate champions' across departments to help shift organisational culture; share best practices internally across departments and with other local authorities; and work with leaders and cabinet members to prioritise climate action.



Centre for **Climate Change**  
and **Social Transformations**

CAST is a global hub for understanding the crucial role that people play in fighting climate change. The CAST team is based across five UK institutions, including the University of Bath (our centre hub), the University of Manchester, the University of East Anglia and Cardiff University, as well as the charity Climate Outreach.

# Introduction

This briefing is intended as a resource for local authorities and those working with them seeking to reduce carbon emissions while delivering wider societal benefits. It is based on our work in Wales, but learnings are likely to be relevant across other regions too.

To tackle climate change, the world urgently needs policies that reduce the levels of harmful emissions in our atmosphere. Such policies are also an opportunity to deliver wider benefits to society in relation to housing, mobility, the economy, health, equality and many other areas. These multiple positive outcomes are often called 'co-benefits'. For example, making it easier for people to travel by train, bus, bike and foot is not only good climate policy, but can also reduce air pollution, encourage more active lifestyles and improve the accessibility of key public places. It's therefore vital that policymakers are able to assess new programmes and policy proposals in relation to their potential impact on climate change, as well as their wider co-benefits.

In Wales, considerations of climate and co-benefits are written into law. As part of its national climate policy, the Welsh Government has set an ambitious target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050. Local authorities are required, under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, to develop climate action plans that meet this target, while also considering social, cultural and economic impacts, now and for future generations.

To ensure their climate action plans fulfil this commitment, Welsh local authorities use assessment tools such as the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) to evaluate whether different policies will effectively reduce harmful emissions and deliver co-benefits. In a recent project, CAST researchers worked with Flintshire County Council in Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to improve the IIA. The project included trialling CAST's own assessment tool – the Carbon and Co-benefits Decision Support Tool – which has been used effectively by other regional authorities such as Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

## Methods

CAST researchers partnered with Flintshire County Council to co-develop and trial CAST's 'Carbon and Co-benefits Decision Support Tool for Local Authorities in Wales'. This involved a series of meetings to co-develop the content of the tool, aligning it with Flintshire County Council's policies and statutory requirements. A subsequent workshop was run to check the tool's appropriateness and usability in Flintshire and other Welsh local authorities.

Researchers then conducted ten interviews with the Council's officers and cabinet members to better understand the successes and challenges they experienced when developing policies that tackle climate change while delivering wider benefits. Interviews included discussion of using [CAST's Carbon and Co-benefits Decision Support Tool](#) (also referred to by interviewees as the Integrated Impact Assessment or IIA Tool), as well as areas where staff needed greater support and capacity-building.

Highlights from the interviews were then presented for discussion in a meeting facilitated by the WLGA and attended by more than 30 climate change officers from different local authorities in Wales. This enabled further reflection on how institutional capacities can be built and supported.

Note: In Welsh local authorities, officers draft proposed policies and programmes, including those related to climate change. These policies then go to decision makers – such as cabinet members and elected leaders – for consideration.



# Findings and recommendations

Officers at Flintshire County Council gave largely positive feedback on using CAST's Carbon and Co-benefits Decision Support Tool. Many felt the tool was more thorough and user-friendly than their previous assessment process, whilst others noted its emphasis on carbon compared to other policy areas. Officers' feedback highlighted challenges related to resources, governance and priority-setting that need to be addressed to strengthen the Council's capacities. With this in mind, we outline the following recommendations for local authorities wanting to better integrate climate and co-benefits considerations into policy.

## 1) Develop staff skills and confidence by offering training and creating a team of 'climate champions'

Local authority staff have limited funding, time and resources, and don't always feel confident in their level of climate change expertise. This means when a new policy proposal is debated, its potential contribution to climate change is not always fully or effectively considered.

Interviewees agreed that a potential solution would be training officers and cabinet members not only on the basics of climate change and carbon emissions, but also on the importance of using a co-benefits approach and proper use of the IIA. Some interviewees suggested that training modules need to be standardised (or at least similar) across all local authorities in Wales.

Interviewees were also keen to have more 'climate champions' within local authorities – dedicated members of staff who can guide the rest of the team on carbon assessment. Whilst climate change officers may be expected to take on this role, having a representative per department<sup>1</sup> working with officers can help share tasks and ease the load.

“There is a climate champion in [Flintshire County Council], but I feel that she is a lone voice. One person is not going to change the culture. [There has] to be more than that.”

## 2) Share best practices internally and with other local authorities

Officers in Flintshire are eager to improve internal coordination in order to learn from other members of staff. Specifically, officers would welcome a structured governance process around the IIA to avoid departments operating in siloes. They would also like to have access to examples of properly completed – or “gold standard” – assessments, and evidence of their 'success in informing decision making', in order to 'avoid pitfalls and repeat mistakes'. Some interviewees mentioned the possibility of establishing a 'quality assurance group' to help with this process.

“We need the [IIA] tool to really add value to our decision-making process. Implementing a system that allows this to happen would be key.”

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of the WLGA in connecting climate change officers to other local authorities and public sector bodies. Officers suggested that the WLGA could offer further support – for example, by maintaining a central database of data that can be used as evidence in assessments (e.g., key statistics from Data Cymru or carbon and socio-economic datasets).

### 3) Work with leaders to challenge policies and prioritise climate action

Officers and cabinet members are generally supportive of integrating climate considerations into wider policy. However, they recognise that embedding this process in a local council’s culture can be difficult – partly due to limited funding, but also due to changing political priorities.

Interviewees felt that local authorities still “*do not have as big a lens on carbon and climate*” as they do on other policy areas, such as preserving the Welsh language.

Officers would also appreciate improved monitoring and evaluation practices from more senior officials – i.e. greater scrutiny and feedback from cabinet members and elected leaders regarding progress made towards meeting climate targets. For example, reflecting on Flintshire’s progress towards decarbonising supply chains, one interviewee expressed that the current assessment system is insufficient:

“I think some things are beyond us. [How the Welsh Government] measures us against carbon neutrality should be improved ... we [should not] get measured based on how much we spend (cost-based proxies). We need Welsh Government to change [how they assess carbon impact], or we need the lobbying of the WLGA [to make this happen].”

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<sup>1</sup>Flintshire County Council has six departments: Chief Executive; Education and Youth; Governance; Housing and Communities; Planning, Environment and Economy; and Social Services. As of data collection (2024), two officers and one apprentice work on climate change; they are part of Planning, Environment, and Economy.

# Summary and next steps

Our collaborative research with Flintshire County Council and the WLGA emphasises that integrated assessment tools can be used to guide climate policy that also delivers co-benefits, but only when capacity and resourcing issues are addressed.

Local authorities can take steps to build the skills and knowledge of their officers and cabinet members, both working internally across departments and externally with other local authorities. Specifically, staff need training on climate change and carbon, but also on how climate issues interact with other sectors and how to conduct robust integrated assessments. However, local authorities also need strong commitments from more senior policymakers that protect the climate action agenda and provide access to necessary funding.

Flintshire County Council is currently developing their governance process for conducting IIA using CAST's 'Carbon and Co-benefits Decision Support Tool for Local Authorities in Wales'. The tool has also been presented to the WLGA's Welsh Language Officers Group to gain feedback on how it fits within other policy areas. Drawing on feedback from CAST's work with Flintshire, the WLGA is designing training and capacity-building activities that can support the integration of climate considerations in policy decisions.

## Further reading

- CAST Carbon and Co-benefits Decision Support Tool. <https://cast.ac.uk/cast-tools/carbon-and-co-benefits-decision-support-tool/>
- Karlsson, M., Alfredsson, E., & Westling, N. (2020). Climate policy co-benefits: a review. *Climate Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2020.1724070>
- Welsh Government (2015) Wellbeing for Future Generations Act. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/contents/enacted>
- Welsh Government (2019) Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales. [https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/low-carbon-delivery-plan\\_1.pdf](https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/low-carbon-delivery-plan_1.pdf)

- Welsh Local Government Association (2025). Carbon and Biodiversity Considerations in Business Cases. <https://www.wlga.wales/resources-carbon-and-biodiversity-integration>

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