

## 'Dramatic shift' in government priorities needed to tackle climate change

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*The UK government is at serious risk of not meeting its legally-binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the 2020s and 2030s according to a report from the Committee on Climate Change (CCC). The CCC warns that, unless urgent action is taken, the British public could face an unnecessarily expensive deal to make the shift to a low-carbon economy, and sets out a number of recommendations on how to avoid this. Sandy Abrahams, partner at LuxNova Partners specialising in clean and low carbon energy projects and UK climate change legislation, says that a 'dramatic shift in priorities and thinking within the government' is required to ensure climate change is prioritised.*

The 'Reducing UK emissions 2018' progress report to Parliament reveals that, while there has been a rapid reduction in emissions in the electricity sector since 2008, decarbonisation has stalled in other industries, such as transport, agriculture and construction.

This has led to the UK not being in a good position to meet the fourth (2023–27) or fifth (2028–32) carbon budgets.

Effective new policies, the CCC says, are desperately needed to enable the UK to deliver on its commitments, and the report sets forward four key recommendations to help the government make the required changes to keep the UK on course, including:

- the government must support the simple, low-cost options, such as onshore wind and woodland creation, which are currently being neglected due to concerns over their short-term cost
- through committing to effective regulation and strict enforcement, the government can reduce the cost of non-compliance and encourage emission reduction
- reducing investor's uncertainty by committing to policy changes and schemes—several programmes have been cancelled in recent years at short notice, including Zero Carbon Homes and the Carbon Capture and Storage Commercialisation Programme
- establish a new national infrastructure, through developing technologies and innovative low-carbon approaches to transport and energy, to keep long-term options open

### **Investors need more certainty**

In expectation of the CCC's 2019 progress report, the CCC presents the government with a list of commitments to deliver on over 2018, including policies incentivising electric vehicles and ensuring improvements in residential energy efficiency.

Richard Black, director of the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit, said the report was 'remarkably explicit in advising reliance on simple, proven, low-cost options'.

Through this approach, Black argues, the CCC is 'effectively recommending the very things that have made the Act such a success—consistent policymaking, which provides certainty to businesses, driving decarbonisation at the lowest possible cost'.

### **Change in government priorities**

Sandy Abrahams agrees with the report that the government needs to provide more robust policies.

She warns that many of the policies promised in the Clean Growth Strategy 'have a lack of detail and many more require robust and binding regulation and the funds to deliver them'.

However, should the government act upon the CCC report, Abrahams hopes ‘we should see an accelerated delivery of concrete emissions reductions policies across sectors’, and that the government will deliver a ‘more coherent, comprehensive and long term regulatory framework, promoting increased investment opportunities’.

This will lead, Abrahams says, to more ‘emerging low carbon technologies across the electricity, heat and transport sectors and to a more robust control of emissions from previously “gently” regulated sectors such transport, housing and agriculture’.

‘Clearly there needs to be a dramatic shift in priorities and thinking within the government’, Abrahams concludes, citing the government’s recent decision to back a third Heathrow runway (see: Legal action launched against Heathrow expansion plan, LNB News 26/06/2018 81) and to scrap the Swansea bay tidal barrage (see Swansea tidal lagoons ‘do not meet requirements for value for money’, LNB News 01/01/0001 2385) as examples of the government’s failure to ‘take on board the need for critical and urgent action’.

This sentiment is reflected in the comments of Jonathan Church, lawyer at ClientEarth, who says that ‘a complete change of approach is needed—and fast. The government needs to understand that addressing climate change is not something that can be done by only some government departments just some of the time.’

Source: Report: Reducing UK emissions 2018 Progress Report to Parliament

*Interviewed by Samantha Gilbert.*

*The views expressed by our Legal Analysis interviewees are not necessarily those of the proprietor.*

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