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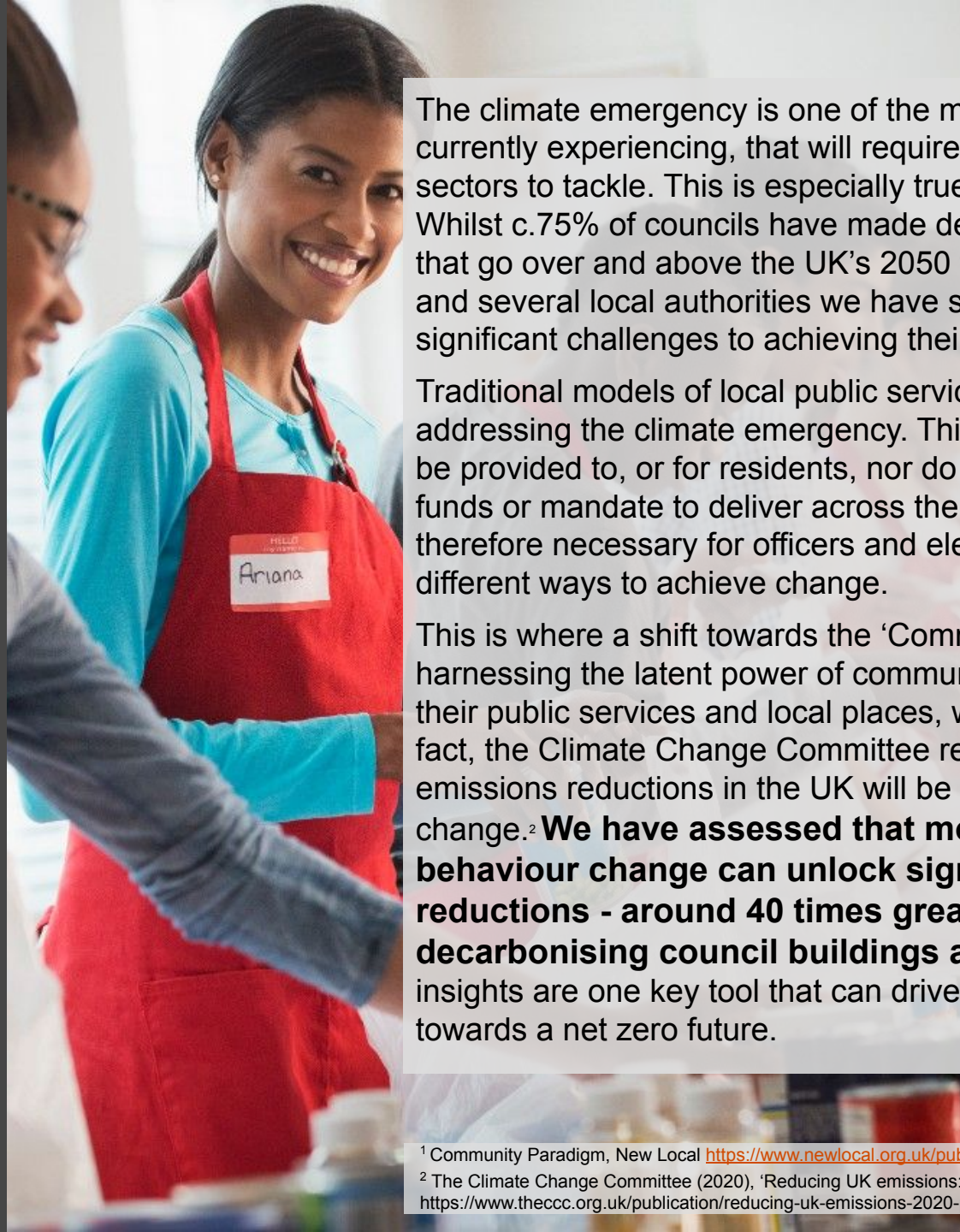
Using Behavioural Insights to harness the power of communities in tackling the climate emergency

2023



The power of communities in tackling the climate crisis

“Mobilising community behaviour change can unlock significant emissions reductions - around 40 times greater than those from decarbonising council buildings and fleets.”



The climate emergency is one of the many ‘long crises’ we are currently experiencing, that will require collaboration from all sectors to tackle. This is especially true for local government. Whilst c.75% of councils have made decarbonisation commitments that go over and above the UK’s 2050 target, delivery is difficult, and several local authorities we have spoken to recognise significant challenges to achieving their targets.

Traditional models of local public services will not work for addressing the climate emergency. This is not a service that can be provided to, or for residents, nor do local authorities have the funds or mandate to deliver across their place systems. It is therefore necessary for officers and elected members to work in different ways to achieve change.

This is where a shift towards the ‘Community Paradigm’¹, harnessing the latent power of communities to drive change in their public services and local places, will be incredibly powerful. In fact, the Climate Change Committee revealed that 62% of emissions reductions in the UK will be dependent on behaviour change.² **We have assessed that mobilising community behaviour change can unlock significant emissions reductions - around 40 times greater than those from decarbonising council buildings and fleet.** Behavioural insights are one key tool that can drive greater community action towards a net zero future.

¹ Community Paradigm, New Local <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/publications/the-community-paradigm/>

² The Climate Change Committee (2020), ‘Reducing UK emissions: Progress Report to Parliament’ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/reducing-uk-emissions-2020-progress-report-to-parliament/>.

Applying behavioural insights to climate change



What are behavioural insights?

Behavioural insights are the study of human behaviour, drawing upon disciplines such as economics and psychology. At the core is the understanding that behaviour is not just the product of individual preference, but also social influence, the choice environment (i.e. the context in which choices are presented to people), and wider **systemic factors**. It provides a lens to identify the factors influencing behaviour and decision-making, and tools to design evidence-based solutions to achieve positive outcomes through behavioural change. Across public services, this approach has been used to design interventions, or ‘nudges’, which improve service outcomes with minimal cost, e.g. improving revenue collection and customer channel shift.

Applying behavioural insights to climate change

There is increasing momentum among communities to do what they can to act more sustainably and protect the environment. However, a range of behavioural barriers can prevent action being taken. For example, gaps in knowledge and awareness, lack of social reinforcement, deeply ingrained habits, as well as practical factors like hassle and cost. Information is helpful to guide people towards what they can do to make a difference, however given the range of barriers, it isn’t sufficient. Critically, sustainable behaviours need to be easier, more appealing and considered the normal thing to do. **Local authorities have a key role to play by applying behavioural insights to redesign the ‘choice environment’ in their local area to turn individual motivation into community action.**

This approach has the potential to facilitate action in areas where they have little direct control, but are often held accountable for the outcomes. Increasing recycling, widening electric vehicle uptake, reducing single use plastics and maximising active travel are a few such examples. Behavioural insights provides a vital string to a council’s bow for these challenges. We are supporting clients to navigate these challenges and turn insights into behavioural change in areas such as recycling.

Increasing recycling through behavioural insights

Our experience has shown behavioural insights can support the sustainability agenda in a variety of ways. For example, we work with councils to address the key behavioural challenges to increasing recycling. Our approach considers the local context and previously trialled approaches to design interventions that drive measurable environmental and financial impact. In some cases, **the identified behavioural interventions had the potential to raise recycling rates by up to 10%.**

We collaborated with a Council that faced the risk of a £2m annual fine unless recycling rates improved to meet Government targets. Our approach involved thoroughly analysing local waste disposal behaviours using area-specific data and trends. As a result, we devised several interventions with the potential to save up to £1m annually and avoid the £2m fine. Specific examples are provided on the right.

The problem statement

In this Council's local area, 99% of residents say they recycle dry recycling, however **almost 7 in 10 contaminate their recycling** by putting non-recyclable items in the recycling bin, or not taking time to wash/clean materials. This results in 'good recycling' having to be discarded.

Our behavioural diagnosis

Contamination is often the result of **misplaced attempts** to recycle, rather than a lack of care. This is often caused by knowledge gaps or confusion about which items are and aren't recyclable, and a lack of awareness of the impact of putting non-recyclables or unwashed items in the recycling. The effort required to sort and clean recycling can also be a contributing factor.

Some interventions we designed to shift behaviour

We used behavioural insights to design interventions that reminded people how to recycle correctly, increase awareness of the impact of contamination, and provide timely feedback when an error is made. Some simple examples could include:

Contamination stickers with information

Many councils use contamination stickers but they can criticise bad behaviours and discourage active engagement. Instead positive messaging reminds residents of the beneficial impacts they can make.

Neighbourhood gamification

Turn recycling into a competitive game by making residents aware of the performance of neighbours and/or local areas. Releasing resident's competitive spirit can catalyse behaviour change.

New mover welcome pack to anchor recycling behaviours

1 in 8 households move annually, and this provides an opportunity to reset new resident expectations of local recycling behaviours, encouraging positive recycling habits from the start.

Behavioural insights can shift the dial on local climate action

The behavioural challenges preventing recycling are seen all over the UK, and these challenges are only magnified when applied across the climate agenda. The opportunity to apply behavioural insights as a tool for facilitating community action on climate change can influence change in areas such as travel choices, retrofitting, consumption patterns and increasing biodiversity.

Creating the conditions for community action is key to shifting the dial. This future requires moving away from a mindset that simply asks how we will fund and resource these activities, to a mindset that asks how we can harness the power of our communities and system assets to deliver a green and thriving future that benefits all. Behavioural insights can help you unlock this future.



Justin Martin, PwC Devolved & Local Government Lead
"Achieving Net Zero is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, challenge of our time. It can only be achieved by public, private and community collaboration. Action to achieve Net Zero has to start in earnest now."

This year's LGA Conference identified that **c.50% of councils need support to reach their net zero commitments**. We have a dedicated Behavioural Insights, Sustainability and Local Public Service teams that can collaborate with you on this agenda. **Please reach out to our team to find out more:**



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Thank you

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