Developing Your Action Plan and Monitoring Framework

Introduction

Following on from the 'Vision, Aims and Themes' document, you can now draft the actions which form the core of your plan. The actions will come under the various themes that you have identified, and you may find inspiration in already published climate action plans from similar organisations, even if the details will vary.

From the outset, it must be understood that this initial plan will be imperfect and will not address every possible risk. This is about establishing priorities, both for addressing risks and reducing your emissions. This plan should not sit separately from other plans, it should be fully integrated into organisational processes. Therefore, our joint toolkit cycles are not highly prescriptive on exactly what form it must take. This guide instead provides a series of considerations and questions which will ensure that the action plan is fit for purpose, but also the wider ambition needed to meet the climate challenge over coming decades.

Remember the scope and vision of your climate action plan. This should guide the nature and ambition of your actions while the themes provide the structure of the action plan. Your work from Steps 1 and 2, particularly your climate risk register, will help inform and provide some of the priorities for action. By now you should have a much better idea of which departments and roles are responsible for priority areas of your operations, estates etc. both in terms of climate impacts and emission reduction activities. If you have used workshops in your method to date, you may be able to begin drafting actions which you can bring to colleagues for discussion.

This is the beginning of an action planning and monitoring process that, if sustained year after year, will evolve and improve over time. Some actions will address immediate challenges through practical projects, while others focus on dismantling barriers to the high-priority risks you identified—tackling issues such as behaviour and skills development, policy and procedural changes, and enhancing communication and decision-making. Given the systemic nature of climate change, a diverse and adaptable set of actions is required, all rooted in a shared vision and goals that everyone is responsible for achieving.

Developing Your Action Plan:

- Activity 1 – Develop First Batch of Actions
- Activity 2 – Review and Add Further Actions
- Activity 3 – Check and Prioritise Actions
- Activity 4 – Develop a Draft Monitoring Framework

Activity 1 – Develop First Batch of Actions

This guidance has been created for use with the NI Adapts Action Plan and Monitoring Template, however you may wish to use a pre-existing template from your organisation, and use the following information as a guide for your process.

Starting with a list of themes relevant to your organisation, set out approximately 3-5 draft actions below each theme.

- **For Mitigation:** Develop actions that will make a significant impact on the key, high-emitting areas you have identified in your greenhouse gas inventory.
- **For Adaptation:** Develop actions to address priority risks from your Risk Register. Some of these actions may be existing work; others may be new.
    - Define the specific climate change risk(s) which each action is intended to address and detail how each action will address the associated risk(s).
    - Make sure to capture any other information from Step 2 risk assessment tables which could also become an action.
    - See Box 1 below, on how organisational thresholds to help draft actions.

Box 1: Planning for action using Thresholds[1]

Defining adaptation actions based on thresholds may be too detailed for every action in your first plan, however you may choose to consider them for some priority areas. These will be important for assessing where capacity might be exceeded as a way of deciding on action, in much the same way as you'll consider where capacity in your emissions is being exceeded to decide on mitigation actions. For adaptation these thresholds could be regulatory, reputational, physical or financial. Some examples could be:

- The cooling system for a data centre will fail when the external air temperature reaches 38°C. This temperature is the threshold; if this temperature is exceeded the air-conditioning will fail, and the servers will shut down.
- How much rainfall, over what period, can X flood defence withstand before being breached?
- How many disruptions or closures to a tourist site are acceptable before alternative routes or site uses can be considered?

The pace and nature of climate change over the lifetimes of long decisions can be uncertain. The thresholds approach offers help in managing uncertainty by plotting pathways of possible actions along with the trigger point at which each would be initiated.

- What climate trends/shocks will push the system towards the identified thresholds?
- What is the likelihood of these climate events occurring, and what is the consequence to the organisation?
- Is it inevitable that the threshold will be crossed?
- Are decisions being taken by the organization that will have long-term consequences, such as decisions on building design for example?
- How might climate change over this period?
- Is an incremental response adequate, or is a transformation required?

Next, for each of the 3-5 draft actions:

- Define the owners of each action. [e.g. name/team name (including role) in charge of implementing and managing the action.]
- Outline the timescales for implementation and delivery milestones where applicable.
- Detail associated funding source(s)
- Note any relevant external organisations. Are any of the chosen actions coordinated with other organisations - locally, in other parts of the UK, the Republic of Ireland or elsewhere? Specify how they are coordinated.
- Provide detail of any metrics which have been used to develop the action, and which will be used to monitor progress. *(See Box 1 above on 'Thresholds')*
- Think about the link between adaptation and mitigation actions. Does this action have any co-benefits (or risks, if applicable) for reducing emissions and addressing specific risks? Provide a brief explanation.

Consider the priorities for the duration of the plan and define what needs to happen in the next few years to embed climate action planning in decision-making across the organisation.

The 'Examples of Adaptation Actions' document in NI Adapts Step 3 provides some support to develop a catalogue of relevant adaptation options. Another useful resource is this Catalogue of Selected Adaptation and Mitigation Measures[2] from the European Climate Action Academy, which does a great job of highlighting potential synergies and trade-offs. You can also look at examples of climate action plans from other organisations to see if any actions would fill gaps in your plan.

Activity 2 - Review and Add Further Actions

Now that you have considered a range of initial actions which directly address your priorities, it is important to move on and add other draft actions which aim to build capacity and flexibility in your organisation for the long-term, as well as making rapid cuts to emissions beyond what is immediately demanded.

Consider the following prompts, and add to your draft actions from Activity 1 to create a 'longlist':

Governance around Climate Action

- Integration with major projects and policies (think back to scoping exercise in Step 1).
- Decision-making in relation to climate change action, and how responsibility is allocated to the organisation's senior staff, departmental heads, etc.
- Does the organisation have specific climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives in its corporate plan or similar document?
- What actions in the mitigation action plan need to be considered jointly, or would impact the adaptation plan?
- Are there major benefits or opportunities to be grasped as a result of early action?
- Is there anything beyond your immediate core organisational scope that you need to start developing actions on e.g. a large asset base which will take a programme of work to understand in detail? Can you create some archetypes to help categorise things?

Organisational capabilities

- Leadership, evidence, partnership and resource
- Training and skills
- Finance and Insurance
- Procurement and Supply chain
- Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

As with the first 3-5 actions, complete the range of information on owners for the action, resource required, indicators etc. Which can all be found in the action plan template provided below.

Additional resources

- UK Climate Change Committee has a range of principles and monitoring resources to help consider what good quality adaptation planning should cover -
    - CCC's 10 principles for Good Adaptation from Step 1's 'What is Adaptation Reporting' document
    - CCC Adaptation Monitoring Framework[3]
- A range of resources are available to help support you to think in more detail about Adaptation Pathway approach and how it might work in your plan.
    - Adaptation Pathways Starter Pack[4]
    - Met Office LACS[5] (free registration required).
    - The PROVIDE Climate Risk Dashboard[6]
- Recent research on resilience has uncovered some of the key barriers to adaptation plans which could help consider some key areas to address: See 'Learning Analysis' Chapter from UK Resilience Lessons Digest[7]

Showcasing Best Practice in Climate Action: Case Study Selection Guidelines

Reporting types of adaptation action case studies can help showcase good practice, enable knowledge sharing, which can foster learning and innovation, by making valuable knowledge accessible and transferable to those who can benefit from it.

When considering which existing actions could serve as a case study, it is important to reflect on those initiatives where best practices in climate action have been demonstrated within your organisation.

To help guide your selection, focus on key aspects such as:

- The timing of the action and whether it is ongoing
- The location where the action was implemented
- How the project was funded (e.g., through local government or other sources)
- Key lessons learned from the case study
- Future plans to build on the work, if applicable
- Adaptation:
    - The specific climate change risks or impacts the actions were designed to address
    - The measurable difference these actions made in addressing those risks and impacts
- Mitigation:
    - The impact that this action will have on the overall picture of your emissions.

Activity 3 - Check and Prioritise Actions

Now you have a longlist of potential ideas, this is the stage to check your actions with relevant colleagues to understand if they have any existing work you should know about, and whether the wording of the actions is accurate and feasible. This can be done at a workshop with colleagues, or one-to-one.
Once you have checked in with your colleagues, you can begin to set out what you think are the priorities for each theme; a process that continues through Step 4 of this cycle. This is often what you will spend most time discussing with senior staff.

You can now define from the longlist of draft actions which two or three are the top priority actions for each theme. This can be done by simply highlighting them in the action plan or pulling them out into a special section. These are likely to be the main actions you present on when educating staff about the plan, so think carefully. Priority actions should be short-term and addressing a major current need, or which are necessary to address a major need over the medium-long term.

Identifying Priorities

Identifying key priorities is an integral step in the groundwork to writing your Climate Action Plan. Remember that with limited resource, you will be unable to achieve everything in one plan. Below, we offer some thoughts on how to prioritise both climate mitigation and adaptation actions, but towards the end of this section, we spend a little additional time on prioritising adaptation actions, which tends to be more challenging to do.

1. To begin the process of prioritising actions, you can undertake a **Hotspot Analysis**. This methodology will allow you to quickly develop a sense of priorities which you can further refine with input from colleagues with the relevant expertise:
    - ***Ranking emissions sources or climate risks:*** by simply ordering your greenhouse gas emissions sources or climate risk scores from largest to smallest will show you the categories that will require the most attention. You should have already identified the highest-emitting areas in your greenhouse gas inventory, and the high-risk areas in your risk assessment, so this should be a simple job of aligning those with your actions. This may prove more difficult for adaptation actions, see 'How to Prioritise Adaptation Actions' below.
    - ***Ranking the level of control your organisation has over emissions sources or climate risks:*** It can be helpful to identify areas where you have the most control over reducing emissions or addressing climate risks, and where this may be easier than others. For example, a Council may find it easier to implement energy efficiency actions in its own buildings rather than buildings occupied by community groups.

2. To further refine your priorities, ask key questions of yourself and colleagues to determine immediate and strategic needs. The quickest way to achieve this is through meeting with the relevant staff and seeking consensus on priority actions:

    - What needs to be done right away?
    - What work is already underway or could be done easily?
    - What data needs to be gathered, or initial work started, to enable progress on longer term outcomes in future plans?
    - How could we implement actions in a way that has multiple positive outcomes?
    - What needs to be done to embed climate action as a core consideration of our work in priority departments?

    The areas of greatest concern in terms of both climate risk and greenhouse gas emissions will directly influence the interventions you will take. When agreeing your priorities with colleagues, there are a few key principles to keep in mind that should help guide the discussion:

    - **Ambition** – priority areas should reflect the change needed to reach the ambitions you set in your vision and aims.
    - **Cost-effectiveness** – try to focus on areas that can give you the greatest impact at least cost.
    - **Co-benefits** – identify areas that will have additional benefits for your organisation and the wider environment and community. For example, electrifying a fleet will have positive effects on air quality and therefore both public health and biodiversity. Many actions to reduce your emissions will support climate adaptation and make your organisation more resilient to the impacts of climate.
    - **Equity** – ensure as far as possible that your priority areas and actions do not cause undue or disproportionate strain on a single area of the organisation or a group of people, and where this cannot be avoided make sure those responsible are properly equipped and assisted.

How to prioritise adaptation actions

Prioritising adaptation actions may prove more difficult than mitigation actions, as the latter will be clearly established through the areas highlighted in your greenhouse gas inventory. To support early action, it is possible to identify types of adaptation actions which make broad economic and financial sense, based on the timing of risks, and the time horizon of the decision.

According to the UK Transition Plan Taskforce's Adaptation Working Group these broadly fall into three categories[8]:

- **No/low regret actions** – these are actions that organisations can take now to address current climate risks leading to an immediate benefit, and which make good business sense, regardless of climate change.
- **'Climate-smart design'** – these actions relate to near-term decisions which will be exposed to future climate change risks, and there is a one-off opportunity to adapt now. Considering these issues help entities avoid future regrets. For example, to change the design of a major new infrastructure project (e.g. a production facility or logistics hub) to make them more resilient to future climate change, noting later major retrofits could be expensive or impossible.
- **Early iterative response** - there are some future decisions that may need to be implemented to address major climate change in the future. Some of these will take time to develop, and some will benefit from improved information and learning. In these cases, it makes sense to start planning now (especially if lead times are long or the potential for learning is large).

Activity 4 – Develop Your Draft Monitoring Framework

The final step of developing your draft action plan is to consider how you will monitor progress and success. Although you can hold this separately outside of your climate action report (for example, to keep a live version on your website), it is best practice to develop this framework at the same time as you are developing your action plan. This is because it clarifies the level of ambition internally and externally, what is required from colleagues, and if there are any thresholds or tipping points where an acceptable limit would be reached.

The overall message is to take special care to properly develop KPIs which are SMART and will hold the organisation to a high level of ambition.

Principles for Mitigation Monitoring

For the 2022 Mitigation Progress Report[9], the CCC refreshed its monitoring framework, and established a set of principles for their approach. These principles, and the wider monitoring framework, may be useful in the development of your own framework:

- **Considering all aspects.** Our approach aims to paint a full picture of progress in mitigating climate change. This involves looking at the UK through various lenses. Our main focus is a sectoral framework, where we consider what needs to happen in each sector across the economy. Beyond this, we consider various cross-cutting themes such as public engagement, skills, governance, trade and consumption emissions, business action, innovation, affordability and fairness. Only by succeeding across those areas will the transition succeed overall.

- **Looking for the early signals of change.** For some of the changes across the economy, the emissions savings will take a number of years to scale up. Our framework aims to identify what the early signs of progress should be and when we should expect to see them, to highlight where course-correction will be necessary before it is too late.
- **Spotting the signal from the noise.** Tracking quantitative indicators is only useful to the extent that it brings clarity to the overall picture. We aim to monitor what's important, not just what's easy to measure, choosing indicators that accurately represent underlying societal changes. We recognise that progress isn't always linear and take care not to mistake short-term noise for longer-term trends.
- **Being flexible to changing contexts.** While we strive to keep our methods stable, we will remain flexible in the face of changing global and national contexts. For example, volatile fossil fuel prices may provide an impetus for going faster than the strategy originally intended.

Principles for Adaptation Monitoring

The following principles were developed by a precursor to the Public Body Climate Action Network called the Local Government Climate Action Network (LGCAN). The aim was to create more consistency for adaptation measurement and reporting in NI. The approach was developed through research on global best practice and discussions with adaptation experts from UK & ROI. These may be useful to guide the development of a quality monitoring framework for your organisation.

1. Periodically review organisational risks and impacts to enhance understanding of both physical and non-physical climate challenges.
2. Aim to set SMART actions, with clear ownership, which link to the priority risks as identified. Account for wider Northern Ireland risks where possible.
3. Measure a range of indicators (Process, Output and Outcome) and consider a range of future scenarios (e.g. a 2°C & 4°C world).
4. Improve capacity, communications and education to promote behavioural change in officers, public representatives and the public.
5. Encourage and actively enable collaboration inside and outside the organisation.
6. Integrate adaptation into business processes, including financial planning

Developing Indicators

There are a wide range of potential resources which can be utilised to monitor and review plans effectively.

- **NetZeroNI -** For your climate mitigation actions, it is reasonable to assume that many of your indicators will be quantitative, either in terms of carbon emissions reduced or money saved.
- **NIAdapts -** Adaptation is more difficult to measure than mitigation, and therefore you will need different types of indicators to build a picture of progress. Table 1 below shows what kinds of indicators could be used.

Climate NI has developed this brief guide to address the basic indicator types, and to provide examples of some of the key issues to consider based on UK, Ireland and global good practice. But you can look at the additional resources listed below for more information.

Table 1: Types of indicators and corresponding examples

Indicator	Examples
Process (Governance) *The delivery of a governance action*	Climate Risk included in Corporate Risk Register, and appropriate adaptation governance in place with senior staff and Board/Directors e.g. annual review of progress, quarterly meetings
	No. of external delivery partners listed in Adaptation Plan - Statutory, Academic, Community/Voluntary and Private
	Percentage of actions delivered (or on-track) against highest scoring risks
Output (Delivery) *Direct results from the delivery of an action*	No. External Audiences Trained by Council Staff or resources e.g. schools, economic development
	Percentage of Staff Trained in Climate Literacy
	GBP investment in adaptation
	Native trees planted in flood risk area
Outcome (Impact) *A measure of the change that occurs as a result of the action*	Water usage
	No. of new developments built in area of flood risk
	Staff Overtime/staff allowances due to emergency response (e.g. develop a new code for weather extremes
	Average number of days of service disruption

A range of other data will also be useful for adaptation, including information on the floor level of assets, subterranean assets, areas of hard surfaces, impacts from severe weather, as well as a range of other indicators of vulnerability and adaptive capacity, including for users impacted by disruption to your services or assets.

Indicators need to be appropriate and achievable, and it should be understood how they relate to the action, and why it is important. This should enable conversations around the importance of data in your organisation and will help move NI closer to a shared regional adaptation baseline.

Other considerations

- **CCC Indicator Maps -** Aligning with updates in policy and CCC recommendations, especially in the monitoring and evaluation stages of the toolkits.
  E.g. CCC Monitoring Frameworks
  - CCC Mitigation Monitoring Framework
  - CCC Adaptation Monitoring Framework

Additional Resources

- Climate Adapt – Measuring performance, defining targets and ensuring sustainability[10]
- Examples of Climate Indicators for England – ADAS commissioned by the CC
  - Research to review and update indicators of climate-related risks and actions in England[11]
  - Updated research document for 2025
- Interrogating 'effectiveness' in climate change adaptation: 11 guiding principles for adaptation research and practice[12]
- UN Environment Programme – Climate Adaptation Target Setting[13]

Appendix 1: Action plan Template

You may want to use this template to lay out your actions. Refer to Appendix 2 for worked examples.

Organisation: X											
Theme	**Action**	**Indicator/ KPI**	**Timeframe for implementation**				**Lead Department / Team**	**Lead**	**Partners** (Internal & External)	**Dependencies** (Who/what will you depend on to complete this action?)	**Type of Measure** (Mitigation/ Adaptation/ Joint)	**Risk being Addressed** (For adaptation measures)
			1y	**2y**	**3y**	**4y**						

Table 2: Action Plan Template for Adaptation and Mitigation Actions

Appendix 2: Action Plan Worked Example

Organisation: X City Council											
Theme	**Action**	**Indicator/ KPI**	**Timeframe for implementation**				**Lead Department / Team**	**Lead**	**Partners** (Internal & External)	**Dependencies** (Who/what will you depend on to complete this action?)	**Type of Measure** (Mitigation/ Adaptation/ Joint)	**Risk being Addressed** (For adaptation measures)
			1y	**2y**	**3y**	**4y**						
Buildings	Ensure any new-build meets standards such as BREEAM	Council-wide adoption of building standards	√	√			Planning				Mitigation	N/A
	Replace aging/ inefficient boilers and gas systems, retrofit insulation and other heat-saving measures.	£ reduction in heating bills Thermal Efficiency Rating	√	√	√	√	Estates				Mitigation	N/A
	Install energy efficient fixtures and smart lighting	£ invested KwH reduction.	√				Estates				Mitigation	N/A
	Maximise on-site renewable energy generation	£ invested KwH produced % renewable generation	√	√	√	√	Estates/Finance				Mitigation	N/A
	Switch to 100% renewable electricity tariff.	Estimated CO_2e savings post-switch	√				Finance				Mitigation	N/A

Environment	Ensure the planning system protects the natural environment, biodiversity and ecosystems (LDP Natural Heritage policies).	Number of planning applications approved in International, National or Local Sites.	√	√	√	√	Planning		Planning Statutory Consultees		Adaptation	
	Invest in nature-based solutions that work for towns making public realm more climate change ready through enhancing green spaces, urban greening, and adaptable planting regimes. Develop a Tree and Woodland Management Strategy to include tree planting, tree health maintenance and woodland management to increase tree cover across the borough to enhance biodiversity, increase carbon store and support	Continued decrease in the use of peat compost from parks and open spaces. % reduction use in pesticides.	√	√	√	√	Parks & Open Spaces		Local community groups & Local landowners		Adaptation	

	ecosystem services.											
	Increased hectares of publicly accessible land managed sustainably.											
		No. of community projects supported.										
	No. of trees planted on Council land.											
	Become a Sustainable Food Place.	No. of trees planted on public & private land.	√	√	√	√	Parks Development		Local food growers, suppliers, retailers, transporters & consumers		Adaptation	
		Promote sustainable food throughout the borough										
	Review of invasive species across the Council estate.	No. of community fridges across the Borough.	√	√	√	√					Adaptation	
		No. of support opportunities for community growing.										
		Development of GIS spatial dataset mapping known invasive species to inform new Invasive Species Management Plan.										
Economy	Develop a new outreach and support	No. of businesses engaged in the programme.	√	√	√	√	Economic Development		Collaborative Growth Network &		Adaptation	

	programme to engage with local businesses to promote sustainability.								Manufacturing Task Force, any additional new networks			
	Ensure town centres regeneration contributes to climate action by reducing emissions, investing in low carbon transport and creating more greenspaces.	No. of public realm improvements / regeneration projects delivered in partnership with Council, DFC and DFI.	√	√	√	√	Capital Regeneration		Department for Communities, Department for Infrastructure		Adaptation	
	Develop a localised Sustainable Tourism Strategy based on Tourism NI's new strategy.	Delivery of new Sustainable Tourism Strategy.	√	√			Tourism		Tourism NI		Adaptation	
Transport	Work in partnership with DfI to encourage walking and cycling through investment in additional infrastructure and creation of linkage opportunities.	No. km of new greenway & active travel routes	√ √	√ √	√ √	√ √	Parks Development Parks Development		Department for Infrastructure, Sustrans, National Cycle Network		Adaptation	
	Update the Cycle Routes Masterplan and include walking	No. of sites promote for cycling and walking										

	routes to promote walking and cycling and promoting this across the borough.											
	Identify funding opportunities and grants available for outdoor activities and active travel to improve health and wellbeing of residents within the borough.	No. of active travel initiatives.	√	√	√	√	Parks Development		Department for Infrastructure, Translink, Sustrans etc		Adaptation	
	Air quality – monitor and review air quality in accordance with the NI Air Quality Strategy.	No. of park improvement projects. Lengthening of greenways and towpaths. Compliance through an updated Air Quality Action Plan.	√	√	√	√	Environmental Health				Adaptation	

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