

City Climate Action Assessment

GUIDEBOOK



written by

The Climate Reality Project Europe



Table of Contents

Welcome & Acknowledgements	01
Why local action matters?	02
Step 1: Find your city's climate commitments	03
Step 2: Scan the climate Action Plan for key areas	05
Step 3: Observe action in transport and mobility	08
Step 4: Examine energy and buildings initiatives	11
Step 5: Look at greening, nature and climate resilience	13
Step 6: Assess community engagement and partnerships	16
Step 7: Check governance, accountability and finance	19
Step 8: Take action: share, engage and advocate	21
Closing words	24
Checklist	25

Introduction

Welcome to the journey of evaluating local climate action! This guide is designed for climate-concerned individuals across Europe – from the UK and France to Poland, Spain, the Nordics and beyond – who want a friendly, accessible way to understand what their city or city is doing about climate change.

Drawing inspiration from Climate Emergency UK's Council Climate Scorecards, we'll walk you through simple steps to check your local council's climate commitments and actions. Think of it as a supportive handbook to help you get started, not an intimidating checklist. By the end, you'll know how to observe concrete signs of climate action (or gaps in action) in your community and how to connect those observations to the bigger climate picture. Let's dive in!



Acknowledgments

The following content is written in English and based on the Climate Emergency UK's campaign. You're invited to look for translation of some terms presented in this guidebook into your local language, as well as comparing this content – terms, entities, frameworks – into your local context.

We want to acknowledge that this guidebook was created based on the inspiring and impactful work of Climate Emergency UK, which took the effort to engage hundreds of citizens across the UK to assess their council's climate plans and action and use it to call for more ambitious declarations and strategy implementation.

We strongly encourage you to check Climate Emergency UK's work and support them in anyway possible – it wouldn't be possible to create this resource without their guidance.

This guide was drafted with the assistance of AI tools and then refined and adapted by our team to ensure accuracy, clarity, and alignment with our mission.

We use such tools selectively to make the most of our limited capacity and focus more of our time on advancing climate action.



Why local climate action **matters?**

Local governments play a crucial role in addressing climate change. In many countries, city or regional councils influence a significant share of emissions – according to the Intergovernmental United Nations Environmental Program, urban areas could be responsible for as much as 70% of global emissions¹. What happens (or doesn't happen) in your city affects national and global climate goals.

The good news is that hundreds of councils have recognized this. Across Europe, cities are declaring climate emergencies, setting carbon-neutral targets, and launching climate action plans. For example, in the UK, 85% of local authorities have developed a Climate Emergency plan².

Your role as an active citizen:

By assessing your (city) council's climate action, you help ensure promises on paper turn into action on the ground. You don't need to be an expert – just a concerned resident ready to ask questions and observe.

Remember, even simple observations (like noting if buses are electric or if new bike lanes appear) can provide insight into your council's progress. And as we'll see, informed residents can spark meaningful change. Let's get started with the basics.

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change, Working Group III, AR6, Chapter 8: "Urban systems and other settlements" (IPCC, 2022).

² Climate Emergency UK and mySociety - <https://cape.mysociety.org/>

Step 1:

Find your city's climate commitments

The first step is to gather what your local government has officially committed to on climate change. This usually means checking for a climate emergency declaration and a published climate action plan (sometimes called a Climate Strategy, Climate Mitigation Plan, or Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan).

Look up the climate plan.

Most municipal climate plans are available on the council's website. Try searching the site (or a search engine) for keywords like "climate change," "climate action plan," "sustainability," or "[Your City] climate strategy" in your local language. If you can't find anything, don't hesitate to call or email a council representative to ask if a climate plan exists³.

Action Tip:

Many councils have an environment or sustainability officer – job titles like "Climate Change Officer" or "Energy Manager" – who can point you to the right document.

Check for a climate emergency declaration.

Did your city council declare a Climate Emergency? This has been a common first step in recent years. Such a declaration is basically an official recognition of the climate crisis and often comes with a pledge (e.g. "Council declares a climate emergency and commits to reach net-zero emissions by 2030").

The declaration might be mentioned on the council's website or press releases. You may even be able to find your authorities declaration on the CEDAMIA map of declarations⁴.



³ David Suzuki Foundation. One Nature, "How to assess your local climate plan", <https://davidsuzuki.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/DSF-ClimatePlan-2021.pdf>

⁴ CEDAMIA – <https://www.cedamia.org/global-ced-maps/>

Step 1:

Find your city's climate commitments

Identify the key targets.

Once you find a plan or declaration, note any headline goals. Is there a target year for carbon neutrality or net zero (e.g. net-zero by 2030, 2040, or 2050)? Are there interim targets (like “40% emissions reduction by 2030”)? Ambitious targets should align with climate science – for example, keeping warming below 1.5°C means roughly halving emissions by 2030 and reaching climate neutrality by 2050, and ideally even earlier, in 2040. If your council's target is much weaker (or non-existent), that's important to note. Remember, a plan written before 2023 (latest IPCC report), might not reflect the latest science and may need updating⁵.

See if the plan is public and recent.

A published, up-to-date climate action plan is a positive sign of commitment. If you discover your council has no plan or an out-of-date one, that's a key finding – it may indicate a need for community pressure to develop or update a plan. On the flip side, if a plan exists, celebrate that as a starting point!

Example:

In Manchester (UK), the city set a goal to be zero-carbon by 2038, with a detailed Climate Change Framework available on its website. In Lausanne (Switzerland), the city's Climate Plan (Plan Climat Lausannois) targets carbon neutrality by 2050 and is publicly accessible. Knowing these commitments helps you understand the level of ambition and official roadmap.

⁵ CEDAMIA - <https://www.cedamia.org/global-ced-maps>

Step 2:

Scan the climate Action Plan for key areas



Now that you have your council's climate plan (or at least know if it exists), it's time to skim it for the essentials. Don't worry – you do not need to read every page in detail. Focus on a few big questions that will tell you how comprehensive the plan is.

Climate Emergency UK's scorecards method offers a useful template: a strong climate plan typically covers multiple categories, from governance and funding to sector-specific actions⁶. Here's what to look for:

Does it cover both mitigation and adaptation?

Mitigation means reducing greenhouse gas emissions (e.g. shifting to renewable energy, insulating buildings), while adaptation means preparing for climate impacts (e.g. flood defenses, heatwave response). A good plan should address both. For instance, does the plan discuss cutting emissions and talk about protecting the community from floods, heat, or other impacts?

Are there clear actions and interim milestones?

Look for whether the plan lists concrete actions vs. just vague intentions. For example, "retrofit 1,000 homes per year with insulation" is concrete, whereas "encourage energy savings" is not specific. Climate plans should have actions that add up to the targets set⁷. Also check if there are interim checkpoints (like 5-year targets or annual goals) to ensure accountability.

⁶ Climate Emergency UK, <https://councilclimatescorecards.uk/plan-scorecards-2022/methodology/>

⁷ David Suzuki Foundation, One Nature, "How to assess your local climate plan"

Step 2:

Scan the climate Action Plan for key areas

Are major sectors addressed with actions?

Check if the plan has sections or initiatives for key emission sectors.

You can verify the data with a tool by our partner organisation, Climate TRACE.

- *Transport*: e.g. promoting public transit, cycling, electric vehicles.
- *Buildings and Energy*: e.g. energy efficiency retrofits, solar or wind projects, phasing out gas heating.
- *Land Use & Nature*: e.g. tree planting, park expansion, sustainable urban planning.
- *Waste & Consumption*: e.g. recycling programs, composting, reducing waste or encouraging sustainable diets.
- *Other sectors*: industry, agriculture (if relevant), etc.

If these areas are covered, it shows the plan is comprehensive. Climate Emergency UK's council plan assessment, for example, checked that plans included themes like transport, buildings, biodiversity, and more⁸. If you notice any major sector missing, that's noteworthy (e.g. a plan that says little about transport in a car-heavy city is a red flag).

Is equity and justice mentioned?

A truly robust plan will mention making the transition fair and inclusive – for example, protecting low-income residents from energy price rises, or engaging marginalized communities in planning. Not all plans address this well, but it's worth noting if yours does (or doesn't). As one Canadian guide notes, we must ensure climate solutions benefit everyone and don't burden those already struggling⁹. If your council's plan talks about “just transition,” “energy poverty,” or working with vulnerable groups, that's a positive sign of equity focus.

Who is responsible and how is it funded?

Scan for any mention of governance: Is there a climate task force, a lead councillor or department for climate, or partnerships with local businesses and community groups? Also, are there budget figures or funding sources for the climate actions?

A plan with zero funding or unclear leadership might be more wishful thinking than reality. On the other hand, dedicated staff or funding (even if just a small sustainability team or initial budget) shows commitment.

⁸ David Suzuki Foundation, One Nature, “How to assess your local climate plan”

⁹ Ibid.

Step 2:

Scan the climate Action Plan for key areas

Action Tip:

As you scan the plan, make a simple checklist or notes. Write down:

	Yes	No
Have you clearly identified your target audience demographics and psychographics?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your unique selling proposition (USP) clearly articulated and compelling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you analyzed your main competitors to identify opportunities and threats?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a content strategy that includes types of content, platforms, and a publishing schedule?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

This isn't an official score, but it helps highlight strengths and gaps.

For instance, you might note "Plan has great transport section (new bus fleet, cycling goals) but weak on funding details and doesn't mention biodiversity."

Example:

Climate Emergency UK's volunteer scorers used 28 questions in 9 categories to evaluate UK councils' climate plans⁸. They checked for things like whether the plan had a clear emissions target, if it was developed with community input, if it covered education and training, and if it addressed the ecological emergency. You can take inspiration from this by ensuring you look at a broad range of factors, not just one thing. It's okay if you can't answer everything – even identifying a couple of gaps or highlights is valuable!

⁸ David Suzuki Foundation, One Nature, "How to assess your local climate plan"

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Step 3:

Observe action in transport and mobility

Time to step away from the documents and look around your city (and local news) for visible climate actions. We'll start with transport – usually one of the easiest areas to observe and a major contributor to emissions. Ask yourself: how is my city moving toward clean, low-carbon mobility? Some signs to look for:

Electric or low-emission public buses

Does your city's bus fleet include electric buses or other zero-emission vehicles? Many European cities are rapidly adopting electric buses – **nearly 49% of new city buses across the EU in 2024 were zero-emission models** (battery-electric or hydrogen) instead of fossil fuel¹¹. So look for buses labeled “Electric” or with green eco-friendly branding, or check local transit authority announcements. Even a handful of electric buses on the routes shows progress. If buses are still mostly older diesel models, note that too – it might mean transport decarbonization is just starting (or not yet on the radar).

Action Tip:

Be cautious of greenwashing – sometimes LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) transport is labeled as “eco-friendly/green/natural”, but this is misleading. LNG is still a fossil fuel, and while it may emit less CO₂ than coal or oil, it releases significant amounts of methane during extraction and transport. Methane is a highly potent greenhouse gas, which means LNG contributes heavily to climate change despite being branded as clean.



¹¹ Max Molliere, Transport & Environment, Half of new EU city buses were zero-emission in 2024, <https://www.transportenvironment.org/articles/half-of-new-eu-city-buses-were-zero-emission-in-2024>

Step 3:

Observe action in transport and mobility

Charging stations and electric cars

Are there public electric vehicle charging points in your area (in car parks, on some streets)? An increase in charging infrastructure indicates the council is enabling the shift to EVs. Some councils also start converting their own vehicle fleets (like maintenance vans or refuse trucks) to electric – these might be mentioned on council websites or visible by logos on vehicles.

Cycling infrastructure

Check out the bike lanes and cycle paths. Are there new or improved bike lanes, especially protected ones (with barriers or clearly marked lanes separating bikes from traffic)? Safe and extensive cycling infrastructure is a clear sign of climate-friendly urban planning. Visible, safe bike lanes encourage people to cycle instead of drive, cutting emissions and pollution. For example, Paris has been actively expanding cycling routes – its latest climate plan will add 180 km of new separated bike paths by 2026 to make the city “100% cyclable”¹². You might have noticed media stories of cities like Paris, Copenhagen or Amsterdam as cycling havens, but even smaller cities are adding bike lanes as part of climate action.

Public transport expansion or incentives

A climate-active council will invest in making public transport more attractive. New bus routes, tram lines, metro extensions, or simply newer, cleaner trains/buses are examples. Some councils also subsidize public transport or integrate ticketing to make it easier for people to ditch cars. Check if your city has any initiatives like free buses on certain days, park-and-ride schemes, or a well-publicized goal to increase ridership. If available, look at the transport section of the climate plan to see if specific actions (like “electrify 100% of buses by 2030” or “expand bike network by X km”) are promised, then see if you notice those happening on the ground.

Take note of any recent additions in your city: painted bike symbols on the road, new bike traffic lights, or pop-up cycle lanes that became permanent. If you can, safely ride or walk through these areas to get a feel for their quality and usage.

¹² Ville de Paris, A new cycling plan for a 100% bikeable city, <https://www.paris.fr/en/pages/a-new-cycling-plan-for-a-100-bikeable-city-28350>

Step 3:

Observe action in transport and mobility

Pedestrian zones and transit-oriented development

Beyond bikes, climate action in transport can include making city centers more pedestrian-friendly or creating low-traffic neighborhoods. Is there any initiative like a car-free zone, pedestrianized streets, or reduced speed limits for cleaner air? Some pioneering cities are introducing “Low Emission Zones” where polluting vehicles are restricted. If your city has something like this (often accompanied by signage or public campaigns), it’s a positive climate action example.

For instance, Paris is rolling out “pedestrian hearts” – large areas reserved for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport – to reduce car use in the city center. Other places have occasional car-free days or permanent pedestrian streets.

Notice if your local city square or shopping street has recently limited car access or if new public transit hubs are being built – these are signs of encouraging people-powered and public transport.

Action Tip:

As you observe, you can make a simple list: How many e-bus lines can I find? Are bike lanes present (and do people use them)? Are there EV chargers visible in city? Do I see city-owned EVs (maybe an electric garbage truck or a council car with a green label)? Is the downtown friendly to walking and cycling? Each “yes” is a climate action indicator. Each “no” or “not yet” might be a question mark to raise: why not, and is it planned?

Example:

In Warsaw, Poland, volunteers noted the city now runs over 160 electric buses, making it one of Europe’s larger e-bus fleets – a big improvement for air quality and emissions. Meanwhile in a smaller city in Italy, a volunteer might observe that while there are no e-buses yet, the municipality has built several new bike paths connecting schools to neighborhoods, showing an investment in active travel. Both are tangible climate actions in transport. By contrast, if a city has aging diesel buses and few cyclists brave the roads due to lack of bike lanes, that indicates an area needing advocacy.

Step 4:

Examine energy and buildings initiatives

Next, consider how your council is addressing emissions from buildings and energy use, which are often the largest sources of CO₂ in a city (think heating, electricity, etc.). Many climate plans focus heavily on this sector – and there may be observable signs of progress:

Renewable energy projects

Look (or ask) for visible renewable energy installations in your city. Are there solar panels on municipal buildings (e.g. schools, city hall, libraries)? Any wind turbines on the outskirts supplying the city? Some councils invest in solar farms or put panels on every suitable rooftop they own. If your city hall proudly displays solar panels or there's a community solar project, it's a great sign. You might also find news about the council purchasing green electricity or installing heat pumps in public facilities. For example, a climate-forward council might announce *"100% of our municipal electricity now comes from renewable sources"* or *"We've installed solar on 50 school roofs."* These may not be obvious to the naked eye, but local news or the climate plan document can reveal them.

Energy efficiency and retrofits

A key climate action (though less visible from the street) is upgrading buildings to use less energy – think insulation, better windows, efficient lighting, etc. Does the council have a home insulation program or offer grants for residents to retrofit their houses? Are public housing units being renovated for energy efficiency? You might see evidence like construction signs about insulation works, or new windows being fitted on old buildings. Check the plan or council website for targets such as *"retrofitting X homes per year"* or *"all public buildings to be carbon-neutral by 2030."* If you can't directly see this, it's okay – you can note whether such programs exist from your research.



Step 4:

Examine energy and buildings initiatives

Phasing out fossil fuel heating

In some regions, councils are pushing to replace oil or gas heating with cleaner options (like district heating networks, heat pumps, or biomass). If you come across mentions of a district heating project or incentives to swap gas boilers for heat pumps, that's a concrete climate action. These might be mentioned in local newsletters. You probably won't see a heat pump working unless you visit a site, but you can keep ears open for community talk about it.

Leading by example

Check if the council has committed to making its own operations green – e.g. electrifying the municipal vehicle fleet, using electric or hybrid council cars, or ensuring city-owned buildings are low-carbon. Sometimes you'll see electric city maintenance vans or hear that the city hall switched its gas boiler to a heat pump. These internal actions set an example and indicate seriousness.

New building standards

Another useful indicator is whether new developments follow green standards. Does the council require ultra-efficient or net-zero buildings, solar panels, or bans on oil heating? You might not review building codes directly, but you can spot trends: new apartments promoting eco-features, passive house neighborhoods, or media coverage of sustainable projects.

Action Tip:

Ask yourself: Is the council expanding renewables (solar, wind)? Are there programs for home insulation or clean heating? Do new buildings highlight green standards? Does the city avoid high-carbon projects like gas pipelines or airport expansions? Not all of this is visible, so combine observation with quick research—for example, search “[City] climate energy” or “[City] solar project” in the news.

Example:

Greater Manchester in the UK scored a 100% rating in the “Buildings and Heating” category of the Council Climate Action Scorecards¹³. They had strong plans for retrofitting homes, installing heat pumps, and adding large-scale solar. As a resident, you might notice insulation schemes or solar panels on community centers. In Bilbao, Spain, the city is replacing old boilers and built a wind turbine in the port. Spotting such actions shows how proactively your council tackles the energy transition.

¹³ Environmental Funders Network; Where's the funding for council and community climate action?, <https://www.greenfunders.org/blog/wheres-the-funding-for-council-and-community-climate-action/>

Step 5:

Look at greening, nature and climate resilience

Climate action isn't only about cutting emissions – it's also about protecting people and nature from climate impacts and enhancing quality of life through green initiatives.

This step is to observe how your local area is becoming greener and more resilient to climate change:

Urban greening and tree planting

Are you seeing new trees being planted along streets or in parks? Many councils have tree-planting campaigns (e.g. “plant 10,000 trees by 2025”) to absorb CO₂ and provide shade. Notice if newly planted young trees with protective stakes have appeared in your neighborhood, or if there are community tree-planting days. Also check if the climate plan mentions increasing green spaces or a target like “X hectares of new urban green areas.” For instance, Paris’s climate plan aims to **open 300 hectares of green spaces by 2026** to ensure at least 10 m² of green space per resident¹⁴ – a big commitment to urban nature. Smaller cities might have goals like creating pocket parks or green roofs on buildings.

Biodiversity and ecosystem protection

A climate-aware council often links climate and ecological action. Are there moves to protect or restore local natural areas (e.g. expanding a nature reserve, protecting wetlands, planting wildflower meadows for pollinators)? Some councils declare an “Ecological Emergency” alongside the climate emergency, focusing on wildlife. Look out for community gardens, rewilding projects, or efforts to reduce mowing to let flowers grow – even small things like that show environmental consciousness. If your city has a river or lake, are there cleanup or restoration efforts?



¹⁴ France24, Green spaces and social housing: Paris's 'bioclimatic' plan to transform the city by 2035, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20241122-green-spaces-and-social-housing-paris-s-bioclimatic-plan-to-transform-the-city-by-2035>

Step 5:

Look at greening, nature and climate resilience

Climate adaptation infrastructure

Think about local vulnerabilities – is your area prone to flooding, heatwaves, or storms? Then look for projects addressing those. For example:

- **In flood-prone areas, has the council built or improved flood defenses** (like river embankments or sustainable drainage systems)? Perhaps you notice a new water retention pond or higher riverbank walls.
- **For heatwaves, are there cooling centers, drinking water fountains, or plans for “cool roofs”** (light-colored roofs) and **mist sprayers in public squares**? Paris, for example, is installing 120 new misting fountains and even creating natural swimming spots in the Seine for cooling off¹⁵ – very concrete adaptation measures.
- **In coastal areas, maybe there are new seawalls or dune restoration projects as climate defenses.**

Check the environment section of your council’s website or plan for adaptation initiatives. If you see any in action (like a construction sign for a new flood barrier or new pavements to absorb rain), that’s an observable indicator.

Waste reduction and food initiatives

Greening the city can include how the council handles waste and promotes sustainable living:

- **Do you have easy access to recycling** (and is the council improving recycling rates)? Perhaps new types of recycling bins appeared (for food waste or textiles).
- **Is there a compost or food waste collection service?** Many councils are starting to collect organic waste to reduce landfill methane. You can visit [Climate TRACE](#) to track methane and other greenhouse gas emissions within your area.
- **Any support for community composting or zero-waste shops/pop-ups?**
- **What about sustainable food?** Some councils support community gardens, farmers markets, or include plant-based options in school meals as a climate action. For example, Brussels-Capital Region implemented a sustainable food program, which includes a “Good Food” label for canteens to promote for sustainable consumer choices – connecting climate with health and local food systems¹⁶.

¹⁵ Bloomberg, Paris’s Iconic Wallace Fountains Get a Second Life, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-06-07/paris-adds-mist-to-wallace-fountains-to-combat-heatwaves>

¹⁶ City of Brussels, Environment Brussels, The Cantine Good Food Label : sustainable collective catering in Brussels, <https://environnement.brussels/pro/services-et-demandes/conseils-et-accompagnement/le-label-cantine-good-food-une-restauration-collective-durable-bruxelles>

Step 5:

Look at greening, nature and climate resilience

Action Tip:

As you observe, you can make a simple list:

	Yes	No
Are bike lanes present (and do people use them)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there EV chargers visible in city?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do I see city-owned EVs (maybe an electric garbage truck or a council car with a green label)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the downcity friendly to walking and cycling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Each “yes” is a climate action indicator. Each “no” or “not yet” might be a question mark to raise: why not, and is it planned?

Example:

In Malmö, Sweden, a resident might see green roofs on some city buildings and numerous rain gardens (plant-filled depressions to soak up stormwater) – evidence of climate adaptation design. In Lisbon, Portugal, one could notice the city creating more green corridors and shading streets with trees to combat heat. Meanwhile, a resident in a Romanian city might proudly note that their council just started a food waste collection pilot in certain districts, handing out kitchen compost bins to households. Each of these is a piece of the climate puzzle: building resilience and cutting emissions via nature and waste management. If your city isn’t doing much on these fronts (e.g. very few trees, no mention of adaptation planning), that’s equally important to note – it may mean resilience is an overlooked area.

Step 6:

Assess community engagement and partnerships



Climate action works best when the community is onboard. A critical aspect to observe is how your council engages residents, businesses, and local organizations in climate solutions. This step is about gauging the level of public involvement and communication:

Public consultations and workshops

Has the council invited residents to have a say on climate plans or projects? For instance, some cities hold climate citizens' assemblies or public forums where people discuss and recommend climate actions. Others might run surveys or city hall meetings on specific issues (like a meeting on a new bike lane plan or a flood defense project). Check if your council's website has a "Consultations" or "Community engagement" section – you might find past or upcoming climate-related events. If you attended any, that's even better! Volunteers can often recall, "Yes, last year there was a climate workshop at the community center" or "They opened an online portal for feedback on the sustainability strategy." Active solicitation of input is a good sign that the council wants buy-in and ideas from locals.

Collaboration with local groups and businesses

Strong climate action often involves partnerships. Are local environmental groups or youth strikers invited to contribute ideas? Some cities set up Climate Advisory Committees with scientists, community leaders, or activists. Businesses might join through a "green network" or pledge program. If you're part of a local group, consider the relationship with the council – is it adversarial or cooperative? A cooperative stance, like councillors attending meetings or giving small grants, can accelerate action. Even if you're not involved, you might notice NGO logos on city projects or references to partnerships in the climate plan.

Step 6:

Assess community engagement and partnerships

Climate education and communication

Does the local government actively communicate about climate to the public? Look for signs like:

- The council celebrating climate action successes in newsletters or local newspapers.
- Educational campaigns (for example, a “Save energy this winter” flyer, or school programs about climate).
- A dedicated climate section in the council’s newsletter, website or social media highlighting tips and progress.
- Participation in awareness events (Earth Day, European Mobility Week, etc.). Perhaps the city organized a car-free day event or a tree-planting day inviting volunteers.

Good communication shows the council treats citizens as partners in climate action, not just observers. It can also indicate an understanding that behavior change is part of the solution.

Transparency and reporting to the public

Engagement also means keeping people informed of progress (or lack thereof). Does the council release annual progress reports on its climate plan? Perhaps they have an online dashboard of key indicators (emissions trends, number of projects done, etc.). Transparency can be measured by how easy it is for you to find updates: if you search “[City] climate action progress 2023”, do you find a report or news? Regular public reporting (say, yearly updates in council meetings or documents) is ideal – it allows residents to hold the council accountable. If you find such reports, that’s great; if not, it might be worth noting that “no clear public progress report is available.”



Step 6:

Assess community engagement and partnerships

Reaching diverse communities

Effective engagement means going beyond the “usual suspects.” Look for signs the council involves youth, low-income areas, or minority groups—like climate art projects with youth centers or materials in several languages. Climate Emergency UK notes that ambitious plans need public buy-in; without broad engagement, even strong policies may stall. This step is about gauging whether your council brings people along or acts top-down.

Action Tip:

	Yes	No
Have I seen or heard of any climate-themed events or consultations locally?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the council make it easy to get involved or ask questions (e.g. a contact person for climate issues, or Q&A sessions)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How does local media cover the council’s climate work – are councilors visible and talking about it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you email a question or attend a meeting, do they welcome it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

One practical thing to try: If your council held a meeting on climate, see if the minutes or recording are available; that shows transparency. Also, look at the council’s social media – do they post about climate initiatives and invite feedback?

Example

In Crevalcore, Italy, over 100 residents, experts, and officials joined a Climathon to co-design flood resilience solutions, initiated by Climate Reality Leader Mattia Lucertini. Citizens worked in teams, presented ideas directly to the municipality, and collaborated with the mayor, councillors, and regional stakeholders. The process showed how residents can move beyond consultation to actively shape local climate decisions—demonstrating the power of joint problem-solving.

¹⁷ Climate Emergency UK, Scorecards methodology blog series: Collaboration & Engagement, <https://climateemergency.uk/scorecards-methodology-blog-series-collaboration-engagement/>

Step 7:

Check governance, accountability and finance

This step is a bit more “behind the scenes,” but it’s important to know if the council **has the structures in place to follow through on climate promises**. Essentially: *Is there a system to turn plans into action and track progress?* As a volunteer, you can look for a few indicators:

Dedicated climate leadership

Is there a specific person or team in charge of climate action? Many councils have appointed a Climate Officer or created a Climate Change Committee. If your city has a cabinet member or deputy mayor for climate/sustainability, or a cross-departmental working group, that’s a positive sign of governance. It means climate isn’t just left to one enthusiast; it’s recognized in the bureaucracy. You might find this info in the climate plan intro or the council’s “Who We Are” pages (look for something like “Sustainability Department” or “Climate Task Force”).

Budget and funding

Follow the money. Did the council allocate budget to climate initiatives this year? Many plans are ambitious but need funding. Check budget documents or meeting notes for references like “€5 million for cycle lanes” or “new fund for community solar.” News often reports big items too, such as flood defences or EU grants for efficiency. If a climate plan was adopted, see if it includes a finance section. Some councils also seek external funds, and proactive ones often publicize successful bids.

Integration into all departments

Climate action isn’t just an environment department thing – it spans transport, housing, planning, etc. Check if there are signs that all parts of the local government are involved. For example, is the transport department talking climate (e.g. planning bus electrification), is the housing office involved in retrofit programs, is the finance department setting aside budget for green projects? A good plan will mention engaging all departments. You as a resident might see this if, say, multiple officials (not just the environmental officer) speak about climate topics in public.

Policy integration

This is more abstract, but consider: Is climate action integrated into other policies? For instance, the city’s urban plan or transport plan might have climate considerations, or new policies (like a building code update) incorporate climate criteria. Sometimes they’ll say “we’ve embedded climate targets into our city planning framework.” You might catch such references in council strategy documents or simply ask a councilor about it. Essentially, climate shouldn’t live in a silo; it should be part of everyday decision-making.

Step 7:

Check governance, accountability and finance

Monitoring and reporting mechanisms

How will the council know if it's on track? Strong plans include monitoring—like annual emissions inventories, progress reports, or an oversight committee. If you find evidence (e.g. a 2022 progress report online), that's a gold star for accountability. If nothing like this exists, it's a sign of “out of sight, out of mind” and a lack of clear accountability.

Political will and consistency

Governance also depends on political commitment. Do local leaders (mayor, councillors) talk about climate as a real priority or just a PR line? Look for signs like “tackling the climate crisis is at the heart of our agenda”¹⁸ in speeches or strategy documents, or whether candidates raised climate during elections. Strong political backing usually means stronger implementation; if climate rarely appears, that may explain slower progress.

Action Tip:

Ask yourself: Is my council visibly increasing renewable energy (solar panels, wind, etc.)? Are there initiatives to help insulate homes or switch to clean heating? Do new buildings or renovations around city tout green standards? Does the city avoid new high-carbon infrastructure (like no new gas pipelines or airport expansions in climate plans)? Not all of this will be directly observable, so use a mix of observing and quick research. A simple way is to search “[City] energy climate” or “[City] solar panels project” in news sites.

Example:

One UK council set up a Climate Action Board that meets quarterly and includes not just politicians but community reps and academics, ensuring broader oversight – a model governance approach. In Germany, many city councils incorporate climate targets into their annual budget planning, effectively “mainstreaming” climate in every department’s work. By checking on these governance factors, you as a volunteer can tell if your council is likely to walk the talk. And if you find gaps (like no monitoring or no budget), that’s a powerful thing to bring up in conversation or local forums – sometimes officials just need a nudge or an example of how others do it to put better systems in place.

¹⁸ Climate Emergency UK – Ranks Local Council's Climate Plan Scorecards – ActforEaling Climate Action Hub, <https://actforealing.org/2022/04/10/climate-emergency-uk-ranks-local-councils-climate-plan-scorecards/>

Step 8:

Take Action: share, engage and advocate

Congratulations – by going through the previous steps, you’ve built a solid picture of your local climate action landscape! But this guide isn’t just about observing – it’s also about empowering you and your community. The final step is turning your assessment into engagement and advocacy, closing the loop between individual observation and systemic change. Here’s how you can use what you’ve learned:

Share your findings and enthusiasm

Talk to friends, family, neighbors about what you discovered. Keep the tone positive and solution-oriented. For example, “Did you know our city has a goal to be carbon neutral by 2040? I found out they’re planning to add electric buses next year!” or “I noticed we don’t have a climate plan yet – maybe we should ask our councilor about that.” By starting these conversations, you raise awareness. You might be surprised – others may have noticed things too or be interested once you bring it up. Sharing can be as simple as a social media post (“*I spent some time looking into our city’s climate actions – here’s what I found*”) or a chat at the local cafe. It signals to others that citizens care about this stuff, which can create a ripple effect.

Form a Climate Hub or join local climate groups

At Climate Reality Europe we encourage Climate Reality Leaders to form (or join) Climate Hubs in their cities. If you’re one, [visit our website](#) and see how to take next steps. Consider the topic of city climate action assessment as a key project for your community/Hub. Share your assessment with your fellow Hub Members and treat it as a discussion starting point. Remember the earlier example: one volunteer’s question to the council led to the creation of a resident Climate Action Network working alongside the council in Cotswold District¹⁹. Your initiative could spark something similar – a collaboration platform between citizens and the council. It can start informally: an online group, a meeting in the library, etc., to discuss what you’ve found and what could be improved.

If there’s no Hub nearby or you’re not a Climate Reality Leader, join local groups like Friends of the Earth, Transition Towns, or Fridays for Future. They offer community, support, and often run campaigns linked to council action.

¹⁹ Scorecards empower residents to get involved in climate action – Climate Emergency UK
<https://climateemergency.uk/scorecards-empower-residents-to-get-involved-in-climate-action/>

Step 8:

Take Action: share, engage and advocate

Engage with your council representatives

Use your knowledge to ask constructive questions of local leaders. You don't need to be confrontational; a polite, informed question often opens dialogue. For example: "Our climate plan focuses on emissions but not adaptation—are there plans for heatwaves and floods?" Or, if progress is visible: "*We've done great with electric buses – what's next, maybe more bike lanes?*" Recognizing achievements encourages momentum, and by asking questions you show the public is paying attention and expects climate action. Climate Emergency UK found that their Scorecards data led residents and campaigners across the country to press councils with specific questions, helping drive improvements²⁰.

Celebrate success and urge more action

Be fair in your assessment – acknowledge the good steps your council has taken (everyone likes appreciation!). If the city planted 5,000 trees or cut emissions 10% in a year, that's fantastic and worth praising publicly. Positive reinforcement can build political capital for further action ("Council did X, and citizens loved it – let's do more!"). At the same time, don't shy away from pointing out gaps.

Frame them as opportunities: "Our city could really benefit from a proper climate action plan; other places have one and it's helped them get funding for projects. Let's do it too." You can write a short letter to the local newspaper or a post on a community forum summarizing your findings – a mix of kudos and calls to action. Being authentic is key: speak from the heart about why you care. Clean air for your kids? Preserving the beautiful local park? Avoiding flood damage to homes? Personal stories + facts = a compelling case.



²⁰ Climate Emergency UK, Update: How are the Council Climate Plan Scorecards doing?, <https://climateemergency.uk/how-are-the-council-climate-plan-scorecards-doing/>

Step 8:

Take Action: share, engage and advocate

Celebrate success and urge more action

Consider this guide just the beginning of your journey. Climate action is dynamic – new projects will start, targets may change, and hopefully emissions will come down. Stay up to date by occasionally checking council updates or local news on climate-related developments. You might even volunteer for any official climate advisory groups if they exist, or help organize community input when the plan is revised.

Many European cities update their climate strategies every few years; being part of that process is a great way to influence systemic change. And beyond your city, connect with the broader movement – the volunteer network you're part of likely has meetups or online forums where people share experiences from different cities (imagine learning how a city in the Netherlands built a great cycling network, and bringing those ideas to your own city council!). This also helps avoid isolation and burnout; you'll see you're part of a larger European effort pushing for local climate leadership.

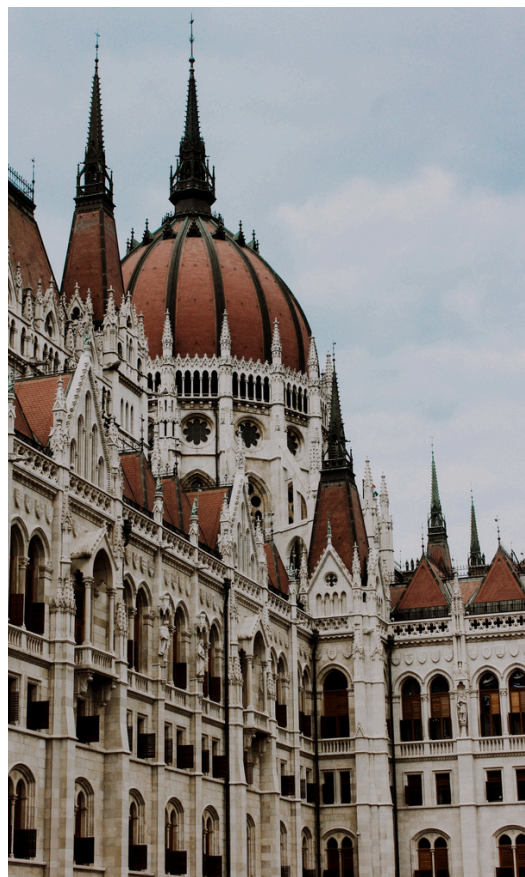


Closing words

Embarking on a local climate action assessment might have seemed daunting at first, but look how much you can achieve with simple, practical steps. You searched for your council's commitments, scanned the plan, and looked at transport, energy, nature, engagement, and governance through a climate lens. Now you're ready to share what you found. This wasn't an academic exercise – it's about making climate action tangible and close to home.

The goal isn't to grade your council with an A or F, but to understand and motivate. Every city has strengths and weaknesses. Maybe yours is strong on recycling and tree planting but lagging on clean transport – that insight helps focus advocacy. If your city performs well across the board, you can celebrate and share best practices with others.

Keep the tone encouraging and solutions-focused. The climate challenge is huge, but it feels more manageable when broken down locally – to things we can see and influence. Back in 2021, Jamie Driscoll, Mayor of North of Tyne – the first city to organize a Climate Assembly – put it well: “The climate emergency is real and urgent. But if we are to tackle it effectively, we need to take people with us”²¹. By stepping up as a volunteer policy-watcher and communicator, you help bring people along, turning a global crisis into local improvements and accountability.



Finally, don't underestimate the power of your passion and persistence. Councils sometimes move slowly or get sidetracked by other issues. But citizen voices bring climate back to the forefront. When local leaders know the community cares, they are far more likely to prioritize and innovate. You are now equipped to be that caring, informed voice – and hopefully to enjoy the process, meeting fellow changemakers and seeing your community with fresh eyes.

²¹ Newcastle University, Newcastle experts join climate change panel, <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/press/articles/archive/2020/11/notassemblyclimatechange/>

In summary, your 8-step climate action assessment journey is:

- 1** Discover your council's climate pledges and plan.
- 2** Review the plan for targets and coverage of key areas.
- 3** Spot and check visible actions in clean transport (buses, bikes, etc.).
- 4** Examine progress in clean energy and efficient buildings.
- 5** Observe greening efforts, climate adaptation, and waste initiatives.
- 6** Assess how the council involves and informs the community.
- 7** Verify the governance foundations (staff, budget, monitoring) for climate action
- 8** Engage by sharing findings, joining forces with others, and constructively pushing for more.

Each step is simple, but together they give you a powerful overview. Use this knowledge to support your council where they're doing well, and encourage them where they can improve. Your training and this guide have prepared you, but your heart and local insight are your greatest tools. Be proud – change often starts with a few people paying attention. Thank you for being the change in your community!

To learn more about The Climate Reality Project Europe, visit our [website](#).
For comments and suggestions, please contact us at europe@climatereality.com

