

A Climate Crisis in health: Reaching a sustainable NHS – a planning perspective

We are helping our clients on the legal mechanisms available to support them in their respective journeys to net zero carbon emissions and greening their organisations.

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In October 2021, the World Health Organisation issued a COP26 Special Report titled '*Climate Change and Health; The Health Argument for Climate Action*' ahead of the COP26 in Glasgow in November. The report, reflecting the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on global health, describes climate change as the "single biggest threat facing humanity" and highlights the links between animals, humans and the environment.

Whilst the WHO calls upon international leaders to set challenging targets, the UK Government remains poised over its flagship Environment Bill, which is anticipated to pass into law by Christmas. It also published its '*Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener*' in October 2021, setting out the plan to reach Net Zero nationally, and pursue a role as a global leader on carbon neutrality. The strategy further highlights the key health benefits of reaching Net Zero and the need for action across all sectors.

The NHS, as the UK's largest employer, is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and is estimated to produce some 4% of UK carbon emissions nationally. As a result, the NHS sustainability agenda is much discussed. In the midst of intense pressure resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, the publication of the Greener NHS Report '*Delivering a Net Zero Health Service*' in October 2020 set the organisation the target to cut direct emissions to net zero carbon by 2040 and supplier emissions to net zero by 2045.

Innovative solutions

In the context of the health implications of carbon emissions, it is imperative for NHS organisations to take action and target their emissions. Already, there are numerous examples of innovation across the NHS:

- Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust has implemented a series of dedicated and pooled e-bikes for staff use on home visits.
- Milton Keynes University Hospitals NHS Trust has installed more than 2,500 solar panels in conjunction with insulation roofing works to improve efficiency and save costs whilst cutting emissions.
- Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust was the first in the world to introduce hydrogen hybrid vehicles as part of its support services.
- Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust has created the Clean Air Hospital Framework.
- Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust has launched its 2021 Sustainability strategy, including projects to review its fleet, re-use sharps bins, and measuring and reducing ward food waste.

The impact of large organisations doing individually small things can be vast, and NHS organisations need not be afraid of requiring more from the supply chain. With the buying power behind NHS organisations, it is possible to push the Net Zero agenda beyond hospital doors. Already, logistics provider, Unipart Logistics, is enhancing its fleet of sustainable vehicles across the UK with the aim of creating a long-term carbon neutral fleet.

Whether it is in engaging staff in new projects, procuring goods or services, or contemplating major development projects, the Net Zero agenda should not be far from the minds of NHS decision takers.

How we can support you

At Browne Jacobson, we are advising our clients on the legal mechanisms available to support them in their respective journeys to net zero carbon emissions and greening their organisations. We are currently advising on electric charging arrangements for car parks (which will be a key requirement for NHS facilities in the coming years), district heating schemes where the use of renewable technology can provide low carbon improvements, and solar schemes to improve local and green energy resilience. As a firm we have become carbon neutral this year and intend to remain so going forward. We have the same goals as you and are implementing processes to achieve targets alongside you.

For an initial discussion about any of these issues please don't hesitate to contact [Hannah Payne](mailto:hannah.payne@brownejacobson.com) in our Public Law, Environment and Planning team.

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