



A heat circuit breaker for the UK

Preparing for a hotter future: a framing report

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The **National Heat Risk Commission** was established in March 2026. It is based at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics and Political Science. The Commission is independent of government, of LSE and the Commission's funder, QCF, an independent charitable foundation. The Commission is chaired by Emma Howard Boyd CBE.

For more information, visit www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/national-heat-risk-commission

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A GP's view

Hot weather puts additional pressure on many parts of the health service, including general practice, as we do see more patients needing advice and treatment for heat-related illnesses or worsening long-term conditions. Babies, young children, older people, pregnant women and people with existing conditions are particularly vulnerable during periods of extreme heat.

Dr Munro, GP, Edinburgh

A teacher's view

The classroom is just unbearably hot from midday onwards and incredibly uncomfortable and the schools do not have the funds to cool the kids down.

Jacob, secondary school teacher, Southeast London

A response sergeant's view

The heat this year has been unbearable. Officers are finishing their duties heavily fatigued and exhausted from the jobs they have been to massively exacerbated by the heat. The offices are all too warm and most of them lack air conditioning. We can't open doors and windows at the risk of leaving the building insecure. We are wearing full kit for eight hours-plus and there is no escaping the heat.

Response Sergeant, Cambridgeshire

Preface

Emma Howard Boyd CBE, Chair, National Heat Risk Commission

This summer of record-breaking heat, fire and drought must be our wake-up call – for our leaders and for all of us. In early August the UK entered its fifth heatwave of the summer. Wildfires destroyed dozens of homes, emergency services came under intense pressure, and millions received an alert warning of further fire risk. The extreme heat also placed growing strain on hospitals and public services, disrupted transport and infrastructure, threatened crops and food production, and hit hardest those least able to cope with its effects.

Looking at the footage of fires and parched landscapes, it is hard not to be taken back to the 40°C heatwave of 2022. The question the public is entitled to ask is simple: what has changed since then? Have we learned the lessons and properly prepared for increasingly extreme heat or are we watching the same warnings unfold without being ready to deal with them?

This summer makes that question more urgent. Following the hottest day of the year, the Prime Minister described Britain as a “tinderbox” and said we “have to face up to the changing climate,” calling for a faster transition to clean energy and a stronger response to wildfires. That recognition matters. But facing up to a changing climate means preparing before it arrives, building resilience into the decisions that shape our homes, infrastructure, economy and public services. As Andy Burnham, now Prime Minister, acknowledged during a panel I chaired last year, “the thinking at the centre of government has not caught up with the changing world.” This summer has shown why it now needs to.

The Met Office has also warned the El Niño currently developing over the Pacific could be the strongest in living memory, underlining how the UK is exposed to the combined effects of a warming climate and powerful global weather patterns. While this doesn’t necessarily mean we will see another summer of heatwaves in 2027, our window to prepare for future periods of exceptional heat is rapidly closing. We must act before the next crisis arrives.

When the National Heat Risk Commission was established earlier this year, it was clear the UK needed a stronger focus on preparing for this reality. Shortly afterwards, the Climate Change Committee published *A Well-Adapted UK*, setting out the action needed to build resilience across society. Its message was clear: the UK’s infrastructure and homes were built for a climate that no longer exists and will be increasingly distant in years to come. Adaptation must move from the margins into mainstream decision-making. These impacts are not a future concern. They are happening now, and this is a new operating environment for UK nations.

There is a danger in focusing too narrowly on the most visible consequences of extreme weather. Fire and parched landscapes create an immediate sense of crisis. Heat itself is invisible, but extreme heat has much deeper and wider impacts, with people suffering in overheated homes, worker productivity decreasing, and transport and infrastructure under strain. We should not need to see flames before we recognise heat as a national risk.

The creation of a Fire Minister is welcome recognition of the wildfire challenge. But it raises a wider question: if heat is one of the most significant and fastest-growing climate risks facing the UK, where is the equivalent leadership for heat itself? Heat resilience needs clear ownership and must be treated as a permanent responsibility of government, not a temporary emergency. Heat can kill without a fire and weaken the economy without a headline. That invisibility is one reason the UK has been too slow to prepare.

Extreme heat affects public health, the emergency services, transport, energy, water, food production and critical ecosystems. The costs are already being felt: thousands of heat-associated deaths, billions of pounds in lost productivity, agricultural damage and widespread disruption. These are not abstract future risks: they are the price we are already paying for failing to prepare.

By contrast, climate resilience must be recognised as a vital investment in our communities, prosperity and future – strengthening infrastructure, improving public health and protecting productivity. The evidence is no longer the barrier: leadership is. Every major public investment should be assessed against the climate conditions it will face over its lifetime, from Treasury spending to planning policy.

Preparedness cannot be delivered by central government alone. Heat risks play out regionally. Devolution is therefore critical. The devolved administrations, mayors and strategic authorities all have an important role in building the resilience of communities, infrastructure and local economies to rising climate risks. If governments at all levels in the UK are to become engines of growth, they need the powers, resources and long-term certainty to make resilience part of their economic strategy. Statutory duties for climate and nature would help embed that responsibility, ensuring resilience is treated as a core part of economic development rather than a separate concern.

Business must be part of this effort, too. The private sector owns and invests in much of the infrastructure and commercial property our economy depends on, while facing growing risks to assets and supply chains. Government must provide the framework, certainty and incentives to unlock investment; business can bring capital, innovation and expertise. With public finances under pressure, public–private partnerships will be essential to mobilising the scale of investment needed to build a truly resilient economy. A resilient economy cannot be built by government alone.

I have seen first-hand how evidence can be translated into action. Following the extreme heat of summer 2022, I led the London Climate Resilience Review for the Mayor of London. Its clearest lesson was that heat does not happen in isolation: it cascades across health, transport, energy, water, the emergency services and the wider economy. That work led to the launch of Heat Ready London in June 2026. The challenge now is to apply those lessons across all four nations.

This is ultimately about transforming how we govern in a changing climate: preventing problems before they become crises, rather than waiting for each heatwave to expose the same weaknesses again. In the same way that the Prime Minister has called for a general ‘circuit breaker’ for the UK, we need a circuit breaker for heat: a decisive shift from reacting to heatwaves to preventing their impacts. Adaptation must sit alongside our efforts to reach net zero. Cutting greenhouse gas emissions reduces the scale of future climate change, while adaptation protects people and the economy from the climate already here. We need both.

This framing report marks the start of the Commission’s work. Over the next year, we will build on existing recommendations to develop practical pathways towards a heat-resilient UK, setting out the actions, timescales, policies and legislation needed across sectors to turn ambition into implementation. UK nations have the knowledge and capability to prepare for a hotter future; what is needed now is pace, coordination and sustained commitment.

Heatwaves will become hotter, more deadly and more disruptive. Our task is to ensure that the UK is better prepared when they strike.

Summary

The summer of 2026 has changed the national conversation on heat. The UK has experienced an unprecedented summer of extreme heat, drought and wildfires. The impacts demonstrate that extreme heat is a national challenge with consequences for critical infrastructure, public services, economic productivity, public safety and everyday life. It is no longer a future threat. Extreme heat is happening now – and it is happening often and will only get worse for the foreseeable future. We need to recognise the threat and get ahead of it.

Heat risk is well documented but poorly governed. Heat risk has been catalogued for more than a decade, yet action to address it has been slow. Flooding provides a useful point of comparison. While there is scope to improve England’s approach to flood risk management, there are strong governance mechanisms for flooding that heat still lacks. These include a strategy, a lead institution, ministerial accountability, dedicated funding, and defined roles and responsibilities. Yet despite being the single largest climate change-related risk to health in the UK, heat remains among the least governed.

The National Heat Risk Commission exists to drive action. It was formed in March 2026 and will work across the four nations, with governments at every tier, businesses and communities.

Recommendations are plentiful. Delivery is absent. Statutory advisers, parliamentary committees, researchers and practitioners have made numerous well-evidenced recommendations to address heat risk, but these recommendations have not been translated into action. The challenge is therefore no longer one of evidence, but of implementation: understanding what is preventing progress and how delivery can be accelerated. This is the gap that the Commission seeks to address.

This report highlights 10 existing recommendations where action has significant potential to strengthen heat resilience. The Commission will examine practical pathways to implementation, identify priorities for action across sectors, and assess where further policy development is needed.

This is a national security risk, and the moment is right to act. Heat risk is not simply an environmental issue: it poses a direct threat to health, infrastructure, transport, education and food production. The new Prime Minister’s vision for national renewal is grounded in a more joined-up state that prevents problems before they become crises. His commitment to devolution aims to place greater power in the hands of local leaders to respond to the challenges their communities face. Heat resilience sits squarely within this agenda: it is prevention in practice, reducing harm before emergencies arise and doing so at a fraction of the cost of responding after the fact.

Our Call for Evidence is published alongside this report. The first phase is aimed at organisations across the UK, including businesses, public bodies, institutions, and voluntary and community organisations with relevant evidence, experience and insight. A second phase will focus on hearing directly from individuals. We invite organisations to respond to this first phase. The questions, and details of how to respond, are available on the [Commission’s website](#).

1. The challenge: the UK is unprepared for extreme heat

The occurrence of extreme heat in the UK this year has reached an unprecedented level.

Temperatures of at least 35°C have been recorded in every month from May to August and the UK is on track for its hottest summer on record (Foley and Poynting, 2026; Laville and Niranjana, 2026; Met Office, 2026a). This summer's heat has coincided with a prolonged period of low rainfall, leaving all of Wales and more than two-thirds of England in drought conditions, contributing to over 1,000 wildfires, and prompting emergency alerts across England and Wales (Cabinet Office et al., 2026; Environment Agency [EA], 2026a; Parker et al., 2026).

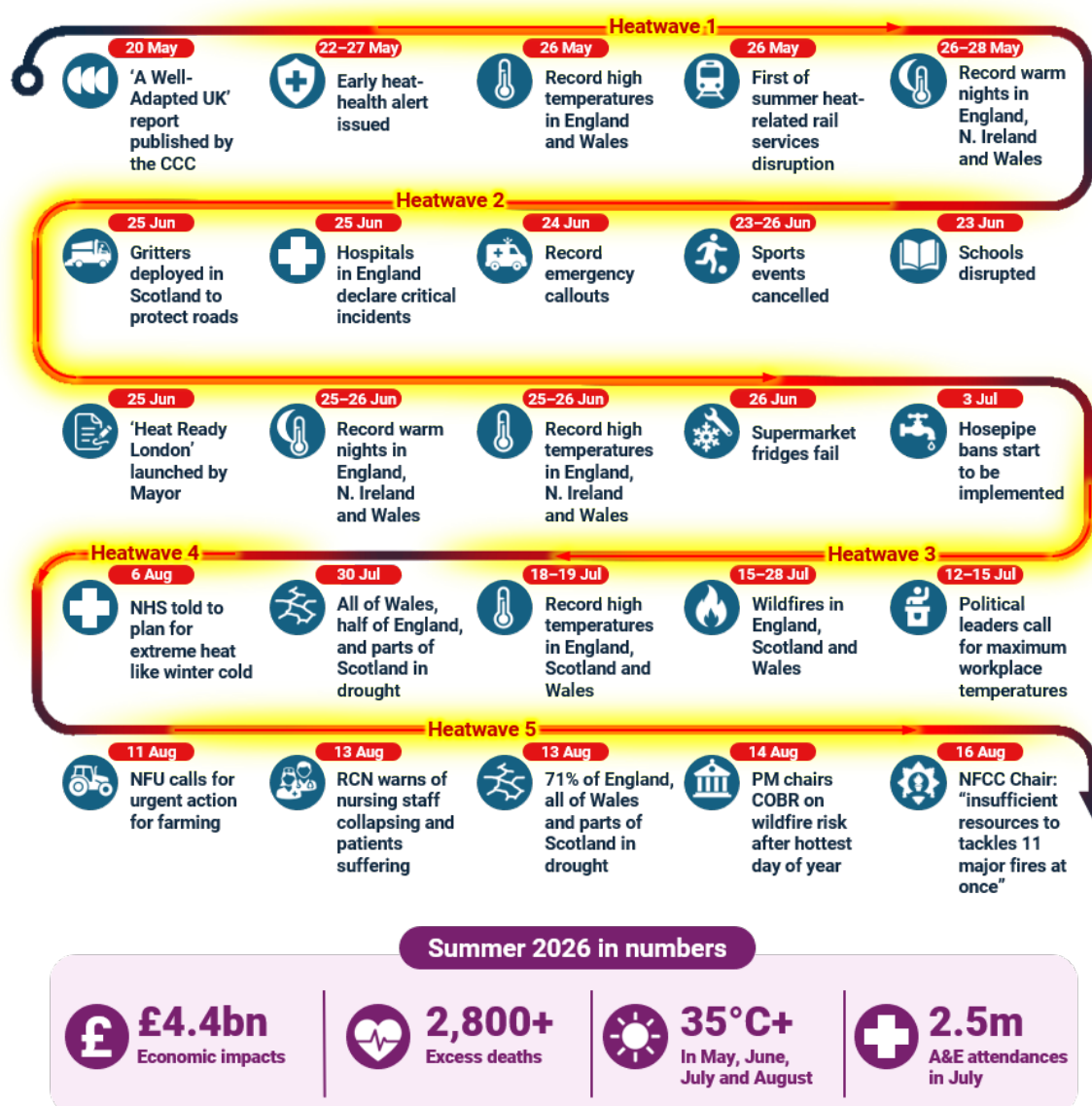
This year's repeated heatwaves have had substantial and wide-ranging consequences across society, creating concurrent pressures on critical infrastructure, public services, businesses and supply chains (see Figure 1; Mooney and Kirchfeld, 2026; Mooney and Wright, 2026; Sutton, 2026). Sectors impacted include education, retail, construction, transport, water, energy, sport, agriculture, healthcare and the emergency services.¹ The sectors highlighted are illustrative rather than exhaustive. They provide a snapshot of the breadth of impacts observed this year, with additional impacts occurring across other sectors and emerging over longer timescales.

During the June 2026 heatwave, more than 1,000 schools were disrupted, hospitals declared critical incidents and London Ambulance Service recorded its highest ever number of life-threatening emergencies (Gregory, 2026; Lancefield, 2026; LAS, 2026; Warren, 2026). In August, conditions in healthcare settings were being described as 'impossible and inhumane', bus drivers were striking, and this year's harvest was expected to be the worst on record (Campbell, 2026; Daniel and Stallard, 2026; Partridge, 2026; RCN, 2026). What could be a clearer indication that the UK is unprepared for extreme heat?

The human toll has been severe, offering a stark reminder that the extreme heat associated with climate change is not a future threat but a present reality. England could see the highest annual number of heat-associated deaths on record, with an estimated 2,877 deaths linked to the May and June heatwaves already approaching the 2022 record (UKHSA, 2026a). Nearly nine million people in England, Wales and Scotland, equivalent to around one in six residents, report taking exceptional measures to cope with extreme heat over the same period. These include sleeping in alternative locations within or outside their homes, paying for temporary accommodation with access to air conditioning, or taking annual, sick or unpaid leave to avoid exposure to heat (Citizens Advice, 2026).

The economic costs are being calculated. Early estimates for the June 2026 heatwave suggest losses of between £1.15 billion and £2.36 billion, depending on whether wider economic disruption is included, and an estimated 24 million lost working hours (Robinson and Dasgupta, 2026; Verdant, 2026). The estimated economic cost of extreme heat between May and the end of July 2026 exceeds £4.4 billion (Meadway, 2026). Together these figures indicate that extreme heat is not only a public health risk, but also a material threat to productivity, livelihoods and economic resilience. These impacts are already being felt by households, workers, public services and businesses across the UK.

¹ As reported by the following: education (BBC, 2026); retail (British Retail Consortium [BRC], 2026; Farrell, 2026); construction (Chelms, 2026; Harrison, 2026); transport (Lancefield, 2026; Network Rail, 2026a; Network Rail, 2026b); water (EA, 2026b); energy (Ofgem, 2026); sport (Weaver, 2026); agriculture (Cantillon, 2026; EA, 2026a; Harvey, 2026; Speciality Food, 2026); healthcare (Campbell, 2026; Gregory, 2026; Royal College of Nursing [RCN], 2026; Trigg, 2026a); emergency services (London Ambulance Service [LAS], 2026; Tapper and Ungoed-Thomas, 2026; Wright and White, 2026).

Figure 1. Summer 2026 in the UK: key moments²

From late-May to mid-August. This is not an exhaustive account of the impacts; it aims to illustrate a range of events.

CCC = Climate Change Committee; NHS = National Health Service; NFU = National Farmers' Union; RCN = Royal College of Nursing; COBR = Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms; NFCC = National Fire Chiefs Council

Why extreme heat should be a national priority

Extreme heat differs from other hazards. Unlike floods or storms, which are more geographically bounded and visibly disruptive, heat is invisible. Its impacts are more pervasive, difficult to detect and emerge gradually, often obscuring the true scale and severity of the risk (Ravishankar and Howarth, 2024). Furthermore, heat acts as a risk multiplier, compounding the effects of other climate-related

² Sources for Figure 1: Top to bottom following the line – 1: Climate Change Committee [CCC], 2026. 2: UKHSA, 2026b; UKHSA, 2026c. 3: Met Office, 2026b. 4: Lancefield, 2026. 5: Met Office, 2026b. 6: BBC, 2026. 7: Henderson, 2026. 8: LAS, 2026. 9: Gregory, 2026. 10: Dalton, 2026. 11: Greater London Authority [GLA], 2026. 12: Met Office, 2026c. 13: Met Office, 2026c. 14: Farrell, 2026. 15: EA, 2026b. 16: Murray and Adu, 2026; Taylor, 2026. 17: National Fire Chiefs Council [NFCC], 2026; Sutton, 2026; Vinter, 2026. 18: Met Office, 2026d. 19: Adnoddau Dwr, 2026; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [Defra], 2026a; Scottish Environment Protection Agency [SEPA], 2026. 20: Trigg, 2026b. 21: National Farmers Union [NFU], 2026. 22: RCN, 2026. 23: Adnoddau Dwr, 2026; EA, 2026a; SEPA, 2026. 24: Cabinet Office et al., 2026. 25: Tapper and Ungeod-Thomas, 2026. In numbers – 1: Meadway, 2026. 2: UKHSA, 2026a. 3: Laville and Niranjana, 2026; Met Office, 2026a. 4: National Health Service England [NHS England], 2026.

hazards, including air pollution, drought and wildfire (EA, 2026a; The Physiological Society, 2026; Sutton, 2026).

Beyond its interaction with environmental hazards, heat cascades across sectors and exacerbates concurrent social and economic pressures such as energy insecurity, the cost-of-living crisis and existing pressures on health services, increasing both the severity and complexity of impacts (see Figure 2; Cold Chain Federation, 2026; Lhomedet and Crellin, 2026; Surminski, 2026; Lo et al., 2024; Ravishankar and Howarth, 2024). As a result, extreme heat should be understood not as a standalone hazard, but as a systemic risk that affects multiple sectors simultaneously and can trigger widespread societal disruption.

Figure 2. Extreme heat affects every part of life and society



Source: © HERA (2026, unpublished), reproduced with permission

A flood has a perimeter. A storm has a track. Heat has neither. It is an invisible transfer of energy that moves through bodies, buildings, materials and networks all at once, and it does so silently.

Heat risk is increasing. The UK has already recorded temperatures above 40°C, a level considered exceptional until very recently (see Box 1). As the climate warms, 40°C days are expected to become increasingly common, with temperatures during heatwaves exceeding 45°C (CCC, 2026). As temperatures rise, exposure to extreme heat will become more widespread across homes, schools, workplaces and public spaces. More than half of UK homes are already at risk of overheating; this is predicted to rise to over 90% by mid-century without further action (ibid.). Schools and hospital wards are also overheating, and the Climate Change Committee, the UK's independent adviser, has warned

that social care settings and hospitals are unprepared for extreme heat (Campbell, 2026; CCC, 2026; Department for Education [DfE], 2026; Pattnaik, 2025).

The consequences of heat extend far beyond discomfort. Annual heat-related deaths during heatwaves currently range from 1,400 to 3,000, mostly among older people, and could rise to 3,000 to 10,000 a year by 2050 without further adaptation (CCC, 2026). Extreme heat has profound health effects ranging from dizziness to heat exhaustion, kidney damage and heart attacks (Dogan, 2024). Heat also affects social and economic outcomes by reducing productivity, increasing accidents and errors and undermining educational attainment (Romanello et al., 2023; CCC, 2022; Park et al., 2021; Hokmabadi et al., 2020). The July 2022 heatwave led to £8.3 million in lost revenue for Transport for London and cost airlines £1.7 million due to flight cancellations at Luton Airport (2025 prices, CCC, 2026). The wider economic impact of the extreme heat that year is estimated to have cost London £1.5 billion (England et al., 2026).

Heat risk is not experienced equally. It often amplifies existing social and health inequalities. Exposure is shaped by the places where people live, work and spend time. Neighbourhoods with limited access to cooling features such as trees and green spaces are often characterised by higher levels of socioeconomic deprivation and poorer health outcomes (Crowley et al., 2025; The Woodland Trust, 2023). This combination increases both exposure and vulnerability to extreme heat.

Older people, individuals with disabilities or pre-existing health conditions, and pregnant women are more physiologically susceptible to extreme heat (CCC, 2026; The Physiological Society, 2026; Rushton, 2026; Wellcome, 2026; Howarth et al., 2025; Park et al., 2024). This risk is heightened for those with limited capacity to adapt, such as renters, care home residents and those unable to modify their living environment or access cooling measures (Citizens Advice, 2026; Hajat et al., 2026; Turton et al., n.d.).

Heat risk is a national challenge that requires a whole-society response. It is tempting to picture heat as a problem mainly for London and South East England. However, the evidence suggests otherwise. As summers continue to warm, temperatures currently associated with London and the South East are projected to become more common in other parts of the UK, contributing to rising heat-related mortality across all four nations (CCC, 2026; Rising et al., 2026).

Governments at all levels have a role to play in this response, alongside health services, employers, insurers, farmers, schools, community organisations and households. As with public health, civil contingencies and flood risk management, effective adaptation depends on sustained collaboration across institutions and sectors. England's flood risk management includes a strategy, a lead institution, ministerial accountability, dedicated funding and defined roles and responsibilities (Burnett, 2026). A fragmented response will leave vulnerabilities unaddressed (The Physiological Society, 2026; Uren et al., 2026; Watt and Surminski, 2024). Resilience must be built through a shared and coordinated national effort.

The Commission's early conversations with stakeholders have highlighted several overlooked dimensions of heat risk. Stakeholders pointed to challenges facing essential workers who cannot adapt what they wear during heatwaves because uniforms and protective equipment remain fixed. Discussions also highlighted how digital heat-health alerts can exclude people who do not have reliable internet access, who are often those at greatest risk. Concern was also expressed that some commonly prescribed medicines can impair the body's ability to cope with heat without patients being adequately informed. Together, these insights reveal the wide-ranging nature of heat risk and the importance of understanding its impacts from different viewpoints. The Commission has found these early insights extremely valuable and is seeking further evidence to build a fuller picture. We encourage organisations to share their experiences through our [Call for Evidence](#).

Box 1. July 2022, the month the UK surpassed 40°C

The July 2022 heatwave exposed the UK's vulnerability to extreme heat (Howarth et al., 2024), with temperatures reaching above 40°C in parts of England on the nineteenth of that month, the first time in recorded history this level has been reached in the UK. The Met Office issued its first Red Extreme Heat Warning, and the UKHSA its first Level 4 Heat Health alert, meaning that the heat was so severe it threatened the fit and healthy (Met Office, 2022).

The extreme heat was associated with thousands of excess deaths, widespread wildfires that destroyed homes, and the declaration of major incidents in parts of England, including the busiest day for the London Fire Brigade since the Second World War (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2022; Rhoden-Paul and Faulkner, 2022). Heat-related disruption also affected healthcare and critical infrastructure, with hospitals forced to cancel some procedures and overheating data centres causing major IT outages in NHS facilities (GreenSurg Collaborative, 2023; Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, 2023). The events demonstrated that extreme heat is not only a public health challenge, but a systemic risk capable of causing widespread societal disruption.

The heatwaves and wildfires of 2022, following the previous summer's flash floods, prompted the Mayor of London to commission the London Climate Resilience Review (Howard Boyd et al., 2024). Commentators have described this review as a blueprint for wider adaptation, combining heat preparation, NHS resilience, urban greening, building retrofits and preparedness exercises such as Operation Helios (The Guardian, 2025). Among the 50 recommendations was one to develop a strategic heat resilience plan. Published in 2026, *Heat Ready London* is the capital's first such dedicated plan (Greater London Authority [GLA], 2026). The contrast with the UK scale is striking. Four years after the UK's first 40°C day, London has recognised the risk and developed a strategy. The country has not. If London can act, what is holding back the UK?

Attention to heat risk is growing, but it is not enough

The need for heat adaptation has been clear for many years (Howarth et al., 2024; Environmental Audit Committee [EAC], 2018; CCC, 2016). Yet progress is still failing to keep pace with the scale of the challenge across the UK (CCC, 2025; CCC, 2023a; 2023b; 2023c).

Together, the summers of 2022 and 2026 mark a shift in understanding. The record-breaking heat of summer 2022 challenged assumptions about the UK's climate, while the heat experienced in summer 2026 showed that such extremes are no longer rare exceptions, but an increasingly expected feature of summer.

Concern is rising: the majority of adults in the UK believe the country is unprepared for heatwaves and wider climate impacts, and many feel they lack the means to protect themselves (Chakelian, 2026; Citizens Advice, 2026; Climate Barometer, 2026; Mesher et al., 2026; Howarth et al., 2025). The London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee recently examined the risk to London's housing stock (London Assembly, 2026). Parliamentary scrutiny has also increased, with inquiries and debates spanning extreme heat, overheating, wildfires and national resilience (Environment APPG, 2026; Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee [EFRA], 2026; UK Parliament, 2026a; UK Parliament, 2026b).

The challenge is no longer just whether the UK can respond to heat emergencies, but whether it can adapt to extreme heat as a chronic, systemic and growing risk. Doing so will require sustained preparation, investment and collaboration across society. Because heat affects communities, infrastructure, services and businesses simultaneously, building resilience demands coordinated action from national and local governments, the private sector, civil society and individuals. While responsibilities are distributed across many organisations, stronger leadership, clearer accountability and a more strategic approach are needed to drive delivery at the scale and pace required.

2. The National Heat Risk Commission

Why a Commission, why now?

Heat is the UK's deadliest climate change-related health risk (CCC, 2026). The Commission's role is to identify what is working to combat this risk, what is holding progress back, and what needs to change to accelerate action. By connecting, learning from and amplifying the work of the many organisations already leading change, the Commission aims to strengthen national resilience to one of the country's fastest-growing climate risks. The Commission is not starting from scratch. It will build on the substantial existing evidence base and recommendations, focusing on accelerating implementation and identifying where further policy development is needed.

It would be possible to make the case for action on heat purely in terms of the harm avoided. The harm is substantial, and it is reason enough. But the evidence points to something larger and more hopeful.

A nation that is resilient to heat is a healthier nation. Fewer people die from preventable heat-related impacts. Homes, schools and workplaces stay cooler. Public services function reliably. Opportunities are created for UK industries and natural infrastructure such as urban trees, rivers and wetlands. The impacts of climate change do not fall disproportionately on those most vulnerable.

Action on heat advances national goals on health, growth and the transition to a low-carbon economy. It is not a competing priority. It is part of building a country that can absorb future shocks and emerge stronger from them.

How will the Commission work?

The Commission is an independent body, chaired by Emma Howard Boyd, with other Commissioners drawn from across the UK. The first phase of the Commission operates from March 2026 to December 2027. **Our mandate is to provide independent expertise and strategy on how the UK can improve resilience to the growing risk of high temperatures.**

The Commission will work across the UK, recognising heat impacts vary regionally and effective responses are often local. Our approach is based on building a shared sense of purpose. We will work with those already acting on heat risk, while bringing in new voices, perspectives and sectors to broaden and strengthen our work. We will test existing recommendations, identify barriers to implementation and explore where additional policy development is required. We will convene events across the four nations, and endeavour to involve as wide a range of people as possible. We will publish a report in summer 2027, intended not as an endpoint but as a reference point for sustained action. The evidence and relationships developed through our work, together with the report's publication well in advance of the UK's Fourth National Adaptation Programme (NAP4), create a valuable opportunity to inform the development of that programme.

We do not deliver programmes, set regulations or run services. Action belongs to others. **The Commission's role is to make mobilisation easier – more informed, more coordinated and more confident.** This starts with the [Call for Evidence](#) published alongside this report.

What will the Commission do?

The Commission will **examine practical pathways to implementation, identify priorities for action across sectors, and assess where further policy development is needed.**

To help build heat resilience in the UK we will:

- **Surface good practice in the UK.** Action is already underway in local authorities, the NHS, businesses and communities. We want to identify and champion effective approaches, ensuring they can be scaled up rather than remain isolated examples of good practice.

- **Learn from other countries.** Many countries are grappling with similar challenges, and some are further ahead than the UK in addressing heat risk. They offer important insights into effective policy, governance and implementation.
- **Identify gaps.** Building on the substantial body of existing evidence and recommendations, we will identify areas where further policy development, research or coordination is needed to strengthen the UK's resilience to extreme heat. This will include examining emerging issues that have received less attention to date.
- **Identify barriers and enablers to implementation.** We will examine why progress has been limited, identify what enables successful action, and assess where further policy development is required. We will consider the evidence and regulatory, financial, institutional and behavioural factors that support or hinder implementation at the UK, national and local levels.
- **Connect the dots.** We want to see the bigger picture – how the many actors, policies and interventions interact, and how they can be brought together into a more coherent national response.

A farmer's view

I think resilience for a farming business comes from diversity. Right now we're facing the biggest challenges we could ever imagine. 40 degree temperatures in the middle of England – I thought that only happened in places like Australia! It seems to me that one of the problems we have in terms of risk are monocultures and simple farming systems. We need to be resilient and the only way we can really do that is to rebuild soils.

Ian, livestock farmer, Cotswolds

A community leader's view

We should not be designing communications for residents. We should be asking them what they need and creating the materials with them, not for them. That's exactly what we did in Hackney. Residents shaped a series of nine different Heatwave Ready Hackney information guides, covering the issues and groups they told us mattered most. Within just a few weeks, we had distributed over 450 printed copies through community venues and shared the resources across digital networks reaching 30,000+ people. Co-production doesn't just create better resources – it creates resources that people actually use.

Krista, Director, CoCreate Hackney, London

A person with health conditions' view

The recent heatwaves have been having quite a significant impact on me physically and mentally due to my chronic migraine condition, as extreme heat is one of my biggest triggers. Unfortunately, some of the medication I take also increases dehydration and drowsiness, which has made the combination of high temperatures and working conditions particularly difficult to manage.

Hayley, North Wales

© Shade the UK/40 Degree Stories

A midwife's view

We're trying to introduce new understanding that [it] is not the woman's fault.

Cailyn, midwife, Northern Ireland, describing how heat-related pregnancy complications can be misunderstood as a failure of individual behaviour rather than a consequence of rising temperatures.

3. From existing recommendations to future action

Statutory advisers, parliamentary committees, researchers and practitioners have made numerous well-evidenced recommendations to address heat risk, but these recommendations have not translated into action. This reflects not a lack of evidence, but **a gap in understanding how to overcome the political, institutional and practical barriers that continue to impede implementation.**

Over the next year, the Commission will build on existing evidence to develop practical pathways towards a heat-resilient UK. The pathways will act as roadmaps for implementation, setting out the actions, policies, legislation, responsibilities and timescales needed for delivery. These pathways will provide a foundation for further action and informed debate on the most effective routes to achieving heat resilience. We will also explore opportunities in areas that have received comparatively less attention to date, such as waste, household food security and food production.

***The country is not short of recommendations;
it is short of delivery.***

Ten recommendations are presented below. These are not intended to represent a definitive or exhaustive framework. Rather, they bring together and organise existing recommendations to provide an initial foundation for the Commission's work. They represent areas where we believe action has significant potential to strengthen heat resilience and improve outcomes. The recommendations are not presented in any order of priority; progress across all areas is important.

While some of the actions are directed to governments, effective action on extreme heat will require contributions from across society. The private sector is central to this effort, both as a manager of its own risks and a source of investment, expertise and innovation (Murray, 2026). Effective action must also be informed by the knowledge, experience and needs of the communities most impacted by extreme heat.

As this work progresses, both the recommendations and the way they are organised may evolve to reflect emerging evidence and stakeholder input. The Commission's next report, to be published in summer 2027, will identify priorities for action and highlight opportunities to strengthen heat resilience across the UK.

Governance

1. Align the national risk governance architecture

The UK's three principal strategic risk assessment processes currently assess climate risks at different levels of detail and for different purposes (CCC, 2026). These are the National Risk Register, the Chronic Risks Analysis and the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment. Better alignment between them would ensure these frameworks reflect the UK Government's evolving understanding of climate change as a national security risk, improve the treatment of acute, chronic, cascading and systemic climate risks, and provide a stronger foundation for preparedness, resilience and investment decisions.

- The Foreign Secretary has described the climate crisis as a national security emergency that threatens the UK's way of life (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office [FCDO] and Miliband, 2026). The UK has launched a Taskforce to strengthen climate security (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero et al., 2026). Recent record-breaking heatwaves and severe wildfires have reinforced the reality of this threat. If climate change is to be treated as a national security priority, the UK's risk assessment and governance frameworks must be better aligned ahead of NAP4's publication.

2. Publish a national heat resilience strategy with clear accountability

The Environmental Audit Committee has called for a dedicated Minister for Heat Resilience, while numerous organisations have called for a national strategy on heat (Environmental Investigation

Agency [EIA], 2026; Office for Environmental Protection [OEP], 2026; OEP, 2025; Howarth et al., 2024; Institution of Civil Engineers, 2023).

- In July 2026, as parts of the UK experienced extreme heat, the Labour Government led by Sir Keir Starmer rejected the Office for Environmental Protection's recommendation to develop a heat resilience strategy (Defra, 2026b). The decision came despite growing evidence of the risks posed by extreme heat and leaves the UK without a clear framework for coordinating action. A comprehensive national strategy, backed by ministerial leadership and accountability, remains urgently needed. Prime Minister Andy Burnham recently created the new role of Fire Minister, and appointed Baroness Blake of Leeds CBE to the position. In this role, she is responsible for coordinating the UK Government's response to wildfires (The Leeds Times, 2026). This is a welcome step and demonstrates the value of dedicated leadership on climate-related risks. A similarly focused Heat Minister could play a vital role in driving heat preparedness and resilience.

3. Empower local action to adapt

Climate adaptation is delivered primarily at the local level. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have each established statutory frameworks that support adaptation by local authorities and public bodies. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, for example, provides a strong foundation for long-term, preventative and collaborative decision-making. However, evidence suggests that statutory responsibilities are most effective when backed by sufficient funding and institutional capacity. The need for well-resourced statutory duties to support effective local adaptation has been consistently identified (CCC, 2026; Director of Energy and Climate Change et al., 2026; Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee [LGHPC], 2026; Howard Boyd et al., 2024; McCullagh et al., 2023; Royal Town Planning Institute [RTPI], 2020).

- Last year, regional leaders in England, including Andy Burnham when Greater Manchester Mayor, called for strategic authorities to be given statutory climate and nature duties, arguing that climate risks such as heatwaves and wildfires must be managed at a regional scale (Climate Emergency UK, 2025). Now, as Prime Minister and pursuing a programme of greater devolution, Burnham has an opportunity to put this vision into practice by aligning new powers and funding with statutory duties for climate resilience (Crerar, 2026; Prime Minister's Office et al., 2026; Seddon, 2026). Doing so would strengthen the capacity of strategic authorities to manage climate risks and prepare communities for a changing climate.

People and communities

4. Cool public services

Nurseries, schools, hospitals, care homes, prisons and transport networks support some of the people most vulnerable to extreme heat (CCC, 2026). As many of these individuals have limited ability to manage their own exposure to high temperatures, governments have an important role in ensuring these settings remain safe and adequately cooled during periods of extreme heat.

- The UK Government is developing a range of major policies, legislation and investment programmes for public services, including the Railways Bill, Education Estates Strategy, the 10 Year Capital Plan for Health and Social Care and planned investment in the prison estate (Cabinet Office, 2026; DfE, 2026; Department of Health and Social Care [DHSC], 2026; UK Parliament, 2026c). These programmes provide significant opportunities to embed heat resilience to ensure essential services remain safe, effective and operational during periods of extreme heat.

5. Improve heat alerts

UKHSA heat alerts do not accurately reflect local risk because they do not include the effects of humidity and are only activated for defined heatwaves in England (CCC, 2026; EAC, 2024).

- Experience this summer also indicates that alerts may not be reaching, or understood by, those most vulnerable to extreme heat. Future reforms could focus on ensuring that warnings are accessible, actionable and tailored to the needs of at-risk groups, so that alerts translate

into timely protective action (Khosravi et al., 2026). This summer's wildfires also suggest there may be scope to review whether existing wildfire alert arrangements are fit-for-purpose, and whether the Natural Hazards Partnership's Daily Hazard Assessment is made publicly available.

6. Protect the most vulnerable

It is widely recognised that not everyone will have the ability to adequately cool their homes or adapt to rising temperatures without additional support, and that targeted interventions will be required for the most vulnerable groups in society (CCC, 2026; Wellcome, 2026; Khosravi et al., 2025).

- Awaab's Law sets strict legal responsibilities for social housing landlords to investigate and remedy hazardous housing conditions. From November 2026, these requirements will extend to overheating, strengthening protections against unsafe indoor temperatures (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG], 2026). To implement these protections effectively, landlords, housing providers and local authorities will need the guidance, resources and capacity to identify and address overheating risks.

Built environment and infrastructure

7. Harness the power of green and blue infrastructure

Nature-based solutions are among the most cost-effective forms of cooling infrastructure, while also delivering multiple co-benefits, including reducing wildfire risk, improving water management, enhancing biodiversity and supporting public health (Defra, 2026c; UK Green Building Council [UKGBC], 2025). Their expanded use across both urban and rural environments has been consistently recommended by governments, independent advisory bodies, industry and researchers (CCC, 2026; Defra, 2026c; MHCLG, 2025; Ranger et al., 2025; UKGBC, 2025; EAC, 2024; Howard Boyd et al., 2024). The conditions experienced during summer 2026 have reinforced the need to accelerate delivery.

- Nature-based solutions can drive economic growth. Investment in green and blue infrastructure supports skilled jobs, enhances biodiversity and contributes to the UK's commitment under the Global Biodiversity Framework to protect and manage 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030. The UK Government's devolution agenda creates an opportunity to accelerate this investment, enabling regional and local authorities to integrate nature-based solutions into place-based growth strategies and create healthier, more prosperous and resilient communities.

8. Develop and enforce standards

Numerous organisations have highlighted the need for stronger design and service standards, together with improved compliance, across the built environment and infrastructure, including new buildings, major retrofits and transport systems (CCC, 2026; Khosravi et al., 2025; EAC, 2024; Howard Boyd et al., 2024).

- As governments and the private sector invest in buildings, transport networks and other critical infrastructure, there is a significant opportunity to embed heat resilience rather than lock in future heat vulnerability. Stronger and enforced standards are needed across both public and private investment to ensure that new developments, retrofit projects and infrastructure renewal programmes deliver thermal comfort under future climate conditions.

Economy

9. Strengthen workplace protections against extreme heat

Workers are central to economic productivity, and improving workforce resilience to overheating and extreme heat has been identified as a priority by member organisations, statutory advisors and researchers (CCC, 2026; Harris, 2026; The Physiological Society, 2026; RCN, 2026; Trades Union Congress [TUC], 2026; UNISON, 2026; Khosravi et al., 2025; UKGBC, 2025; Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers [USDW], 2025). In the June 2026 heatwave, nearly nine out of 10

workers in a nationally representative sample reported at least one heat-related health impact (Robinson and Dasgupta, 2026). As heatwaves become more frequent and severe, the economic costs of workplace overheating will continue to grow unless workers and employers are better equipped to adapt.

- Political support for setting maximum workplace temperatures is growing, with Hannah Spencer MP and the Mayor of London publicly backing reform (Murray and Adu, 2026; Taylor, 2026). The Health and Safety Executive's autumn consultation offers an opportunity to modernise workplace regulations, protecting workers while reducing heat-related productivity losses (Reynolds, 2026).

10. Strengthen the evidence base for heat adaptation

Effective policy and operational decision-making relies on robust data and actionable information (CCC, 2026; Institution of Mechanical Engineers, 2026; Khosravi et al., 2025). A strong evidence base exists; however, some gaps remain such as monitoring of indoor temperatures, workplace heat impacts, and heat-related illness, morbidity and mortality (CCC, 2026; CCC, 2025; Public Health Wales Health Protection Division, 2025). Addressing shortcomings in evidence was identified as a priority in the Heat Ready London plan, which called for new datasets, improved heat risk mapping, better evaluation and improved data sharing (GLA, 2026). Strengthening the evidence base would enable more effective targeting of resources and better assessment of progress.

We have already begun promoting these, and other, recommendations through our written evidence to UK Parliament, including submissions to the inquiries by the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee into the economics of climate and nature and air quality, the inquiry by the House of Lords National Resilience Committee into national and local preparedness and resilience, the inquiry by the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on wildfire, and the Environment All-Party Parliamentary Group's work on climate resilience. We will continue to engage with UK Parliament and the devolved legislatures, governments, industry and civil society to support heat resilience over the coming months.

4. Call for Evidence

Alongside this report, the Commission has published a Call for Evidence. The first phase is aimed at organisations across the UK with relevant evidence, experience or insight. This includes businesses, public bodies, institutions, and voluntary and community organisations. A second phase will focus on hearing directly from individuals.

The Call seeks evidence on the impacts of extreme heat, who was most affected, what worked and what did not, and where evidence gaps remain. It also asks why existing recommendations have not been implemented and what is needed to turn them into action.

The Commission's programme is not yet fixed. The Call for Evidence is how we test the framing set out in this report and will help us decide where to focus our attention.

The full questions and details of how to respond to our Call for Evidence are available on the Commission's website at www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/national-heat-risk-commission-evidence/

5. Looking ahead

The political moment reinforces the practical one. The new Prime Minister has called for “a circuit breaker for Britain”, a ten-year plan for the UK, and a more preventative state that acts early to reduce risks and future costs (Burnham, 2026). At the same time, senior politicians are increasingly recognising the real-world consequences of climate change (Cabinet Office et al., 2026; Eagle, 2026; FCDO and Miliband, 2026; McManan-Smith, 2026). Few issues embody the case for prevention more clearly than extreme heat. The risks are growing, the costs of inaction are rising, and the benefits of preparedness are substantial (CCC, 2026; Rising et al., 2026).

The UK Government’s existing priorities provide a ready-made opportunity to put this vision into action. Major Bills before UK Parliament, such as the Railways Bill and Clean Water Bill, and policies such as the New Towns Programme, Education Estates Strategy and the 10-Year Capital Plan for Health and Social Care, offer opportunities to embed heat resilience into long-term decisions. This has been done before: the National Energy System Operator (NESO) provides an example of how climate resilience can be embedded within an organisation’s core duties (CCC, 2026).

The Commission’s work is intended to help governments, businesses and communities prepare, by providing the evidence and confidence needed to embed heat resilience in decisions being made today.

This is, in the end, about the kind of country we choose to be. Our unpreparedness is not something that has happened to us: it is the result of choices, and different choices are available. We know what the risks are. We know that much of the harm is avoidable. We know, broadly, what to do and what it would cost. What remains is the will to act and the sustained attention to see it through.

The role of the National Heat Risk Commission is to bring people together, focus attention on the challenge, and help identify the actions needed to build a more heat-resilient UK. Our [Call for Evidence](#) is now open, and we invite contributions from across the four nations.

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