

The Local Climate Report:

State of UK council climate action



November 2025

Introduction

Climate Emergency UK exists to equip the council climate movement with the data and insights needed to accelerate local climate action. That underlying mission was the driving force behind the Council Climate Action Scorecards — and is the reason for this report.

The Local Climate Report provides in-depth analysis of the Scorecards, and shines a light on the current state of UK council climate action.

Our theory of change is that more accessible data matched with effective public accountability, results in more efficient and effective climate action at the local level.

The impacts of the climate crisis can seem overwhelming from the perspective of one council looking at their limited capacity for impact. But seen in aggregate, every tonne of emissions saved matters.

In fact, the only way in which we are going to reach our goals is together. Every reduction in the use of fossil fuel matters, and every council that has fought back against fracking, decarbonised their buildings and retrofitted their housing stock matters, when we see the sum of the difference we are all making.

So what is the state of UK council climate action? After the initial momentum of climate emergency declarations, the corresponding action has been tepid. Councils' average score in the 2025 Scorecards was 38%, demonstrating improvement — but not at the scale and pace that the climate and nature emergencies demand.

It's not all doom and gloom: there are highlights in this report. The fact that many councils have reduced their mowing regimes, creating habitat and wildflower areas; the roll out of electric buses and EV chargers; and many more councils promoting plant based school meals — all of these actions demonstrate that change can be made.

That said, there is also an awful lot of work left to do. We need more councils to step up and take bold action to reduce transport emissions by introducing car clubs and prioritising active travel. We need more councils to introduce net zero standards for new housing development and play an active role in heat pump delivery; and we need councils to help sow further seeds for change in our food system.

We are a part of the council climate movement — supported by many wonderful allies and organisations. We would like to thank all of the amazing contributors that added their expert analysis to this report, as well as Sophie Mosselmans from Imperial University, who helped us collate the data.

Of course, a special thanks must go to all of the volunteers who contributed so many hours to create the Scorecards, with many then utilising them to push for further climate action. A final thanks to our funders, particularly the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Foundation for funding the creation of the infographics, and longstanding partners mySociety, who designed the infographics and built the tools so that we can run the Scorecards project.

There is no guarantee that the next few years will see improvements in climate action at every council. At Climate Emergency UK we will continue to hold councils to account, and work to support a movement of thousands of councillors, officers and local residents who are all trying to reach the same goal: to create healthier, less polluted, more resilient communities that allow people and nature to thrive.



Foreword

Councils on the Climate Front Line: A Snapshot, Progress and Call to Action

By **Louise Marix Evans**
Director, Quantum Strategy & Technology



Councils are on the front line of climate change - responsible for changes in transport, housing, and infrastructure that shape a safer, low-carbon future. And at the sharp end in flood and heatwave emergencies.

The Council Climate Action Scorecards offer a concise snapshot, show what is possible, and make a call to action to do more. They demonstrate how councils are tackling the climate crisis and adapting to extreme weather; highlight where we need to do better; and show that local leadership is essential to achieving national goals.

The Action Scorecards paint a mixed picture, unsurprising given the scale of the challenge and the uneven national policy landscape. Yet, the results demonstrate real progress, driven by skilled council officers and determined councillors and communities.

Council must start effectively tackling our biggest emitting sectors - transport and buildings.

Planning underpins this. While 65% of planning authorities have mapped for either new solar, wind, or district heating sites, only 18% have set net zero standards for new homes.

Councils need buildings and energy plans. 96% of councils offer funding for home retrofits, yet just 37% enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards for renters, and must double down on cold, inefficient private rentals. Decarbonising heat with heat pumps, and for some places, district heating, is a priority.

Councils need long-term, well-sequenced transport investment plans. Progress is underway, with more public EV chargers but no transport authority has the top rating for Active Travel England's capability ratings so safe, connected walking and cycling networks are incomplete. The buses on our streets are gradually becoming cleaner, yet only four Mayoral Authorities have electric buses making up over 10% of their bus fleets.

Councils are increasingly reporting on their Climate Action Plans and embedding climate across policy-making, but we need all councils to include climate risks in their Corporate Risk Register, otherwise this leaves them, and their communities, exposed to unexpected emergencies and costs.

Critically they need to meaningfully engage citizens and businesses alongside confident leadership that isn't swayed by the loudest voices. Councils can deliver a fair transition to a more resilient future that benefits everybody with cleaner air, warmer homes and better transport.

The UK Government and devolved nations must support local climate action and short-term, competitive grants must be replaced with long-term, stable funding.

Governments should embed net zero, adaptation, and nature recovery in every national policy, from housing to infrastructure, and set ambitious frameworks to drive consistency, coordinating across national, regional and local governance.

Councils should be trusted and involved in policy design, resourced properly, and given time to co-create local solutions with residents and businesses. Avoiding stop-start schemes and funding cliff edges prevent progress being undermined and build necessary local skills and supply chains.

Finally, the Government should hold councils accountable with clear emissions and adaptation metrics, backed by feedback and support. As in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, England's councils should also have a legal duty to deliver the Climate Change Act and contribute to carbon budgets. Only then can we mitigate and adapt to the climate emergency, putting us on a trajectory for a fairer, resilient, cleaner and greener UK.

Adaptation

Building resilient communities: how councils are adapting to a changing climate

By **Emma Bull**
Assistant Director, Local Partnerships



The 2025 Action Scorecards assess councils on tangible actions. While mitigation often has clear, measurable targets (e.g. emissions reductions) adaptation is harder to measure, as it's often embedded in broader activities and currently lacks defined performance indicators. Still, progress is evident; 34% of councils now include climate risks in their corporate risk registers and are integrating adaptation into planning processes. The Scorecards demonstrate that, even without statutory duties or dedicated funding, councils are taking significant steps to build resilience within their organisations and communities.

Adaptation actions aim to reduce and manage the impact of future climate risks and build long-term resilience, making it harder to demonstrate short-term success. Much of the work councils are doing isn't explicitly labelled as "adaptation" but it still protects communities from

Case study: Yorkshire & Humber

In 2023, the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission ran a pilot climate adaptation programme with 13 local authorities across the Yorkshire region, supporting them to embed climate adaptation and resilience within both service delivery and internal operations. The programme was based on the Local Partnerships Climate Adaptation Toolkit. Participating councils were supported to develop or update their climate risk assessments and adaptation strategies. Many reported increased confidence in this area, particularly due to the opportunity to share learning and peer support. These councils, on average, improved their scores in the 2025 Scorecards compared to 2023.

climate impacts, for example through place making and planning, retrofit and highways maintenance. The Scorecards show 96% of councils offer retrofit funding to residents, which helps reduce overheating during heatwaves. Additionally, 82% of councils support community food growing initiatives, improving local food resilience in the face of global and national supply chain disruptions exacerbated by climate change.

To build resilient communities, mitigation and adaptation must go hand in hand. Mitigation reduces the severity of climate impacts, while adaptation strengthens the ability to manage and recover from them. Together, they build climate resilience across council services and the communities they serve. It's not just about clearing up after the flood; it's about redesigning services and places to withstand future impacts. Encouragingly, 45% of planning authorities avoid building new developments on high flood-risk land.

Retrofit programmes, for example, must go beyond insulation to include cooling and ventilation measures to prepare for increased frequency of extreme heat, while making the most cost-effective use of funding and avoiding maladaptation. More broadly, councils need to shift from short-term crisis response to longer-term resilience planning, supported by cross-departmental collaboration that goes beyond business continuity planning, and embeds climate resilience as a fundamental element of service design.

Local councils are doing what they can, but they need national support to accelerate progress. A report by the Local Government Association (LGA) stresses government action is needed to drive adaptation forwards. Key recommendations include providing clear national frameworks, guidance and tools, improving access to localised climate risk data, and clarifying roles and responsibilities across government levels and partners to ensure accountability. The report also highlights the importance of regional collaboration, because floods, heatwaves and storms don't respect council boundaries. Effective adaptation requires coordinated, cross-boundary action, to build resilience for both people and places.

Adaptation

Councils play a vital role in mitigating climate change by reducing emissions, but with increasingly frequent and more intense heatwaves, floods and wildfires, they must also lead on climate adaptation. Councils can build climate resilient communities by supporting local food production, planting trees, and ensuring that both new and existing homes are climate-resilient. Embedding resilience into council policies, strategies, and engagement is essential to making adaptation a core part of council operations.

The Scorecards include 93 questions, almost all of which contribute both to reducing emissions and increasing resilience in councils and communities. For this adaptation focused infographic, we've highlighted the questions that are most relevant to climate adaptation with the majority not featured in the other infographics.



CREATING CLIMATE RESILIENT NEW HOMES

 **62%** ▲ 3 versus 2023
of planning authorities set the highest water efficiency standards for new builds¹

 **45%** ▲ 3 versus 2023
of planning authorities avoid building new development on land that is most at risk of flooding²

 **12%**
of planning authorities have introduced the Green Space Factor into new development³

EMBEDDING RESILIENCE ACROSS THE COUNCIL

 **34%**
of councils⁴ include climate risks in their Corporate Risk Register⁵

 **34%**
of councils consulted residents most affected by climate change and climate initiatives⁶

SUPPORTING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

 **96%** No change versus 2023
of local authorities⁷ offer funding to residents to retrofit their homes⁸

 **64%** ▲ 38 versus 2023
of local authorities support circular economy projects⁹

 **24%** ▲ 7 versus 2023
of councils have a tree cover target and a tree management plan¹⁰

82% ▲ 25 versus 2023
of local authorities support community food growing initiatives¹¹



Biodiversity

Local authority action for wildlife: still on the verges

By **Richard Benwell**
CEO, Wildlife & Countryside Link



The Government has a duty to halt the decline of wildlife in this Parliament.

Local authorities have a pivotal role to play in the most important UK nature targets: (1) to restore the abundance of wildlife, (2) to protect at least 30% of the land and sea for nature, and (3) to halve the impact of toxic chemicals and pesticides.

This year's Scorecards show encouraging signs that when it's within their gift, local authorities respond to public demand for environmental action. The fact that the great majority of councils now cut back mowing to allow verges to flourish and dim the lamps to reduce light pollution is a sign of willingness to act.

It helps that for greener grass cutting regimes and lighting there are real cost-savings. These are easy win-wins. However, the "win-wins" aren't always so obvious and choices aren't always easy. Where

Case study: Oxfordshire

In Oxfordshire, the Local Nature Partnership and the Councils are forging an excellent relationship with nature action in mind. The Partnership is focused on landscape recovery, connecting people with nature, and attracting large-scale investment in nature restoration. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will set ambitious targets to help deliver the goals. As governance in Oxfordshire is reshaped under devolution plans, the next step is to ensure that this positive support and ambition translates into everyday decision-making on planning and spending that supports nature recovery.

returns are longer-term and less certain, councils are still struggling. More direction and support from central government is needed, and more bravery from Local Government leaders.

To reverse the decline of wildlife, more land must be managed for nature. Here, the tools at Councils' disposal include Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Development Planning.

Authorities can require developers to achieve more than the statutory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain for new developments, but only a handful of authorities have done so. This may reflect messages coming down from a growth-focused government and uncertainty created by consultations to water down net gain policy. Government should steady the ship and give guidance to encourage higher ambition in net gain.

On pesticide reduction, a win for nature would be a win for public health too. Spraying in urban areas adds to the cocktail of chemicals people are exposed to on a daily basis and to the pollution load running into our rivers. Yet Government leadership has been missing, as the UK falls further behind the EU in banning toxic chemicals. Countries like France, Denmark and Luxembourg have managed to remove pesticides from urban centres, so why not the UK?

As always, trees are a good indicator for public concern for nature. England has a legally binding target to increase tree cover to 16.5% by 2050, but so far progress has fallen short every year. The Government has given clearer signals here, with the creation of a new national forest and more funding for tree-planting. But Local Nature Recovery Strategies are meant to be the driving force for local delivery of habitat goals and so far they lack delivery funds.

Local authorities have the potential to be the driving force of English nature recovery. Government must do more to set a strategic direction and provide the local skills and funding needed for nature. In the meantime, please ask your council to set a lead.

Biodiversity

The biodiversity crisis needs to be tackled alongside the climate crisis. The Biodiversity section covers the actions councils can take to improve biodiversity in their area, while helping to reduce emissions and adapt to the climate crisis. It also covers what combined authorities can do to enable biodiversity improvement across the region they cover.

2025 average score and 2023 comparison

by council type

32% Single Tier ▲ 5

28% District ▲ 6

43% County ▲ 13

28% Northern Ireland ▼ 10

While there have been improvements across this Biodiversity section, noticeable in the reduction of mowing, action continues to lag. A large proportion of authorities are still without planning ecologists, while the vast majority are continuing to use pesticides and peat based products.

90% ▲ 10 versus 2023
of local authorities have reduced mowing or created wildflower habitat in their area

ENHANCING HABITAT

57% ▲ 8 versus 2023
of local authorities turn off or dim their street lighting, including 81% of county councils

6 No change versus 2023
combined authorities provide significant funding for biodiversity

IMPROVEMENT NEEDED

54% ▲ 22 versus 2023
of local authorities employ a planning ecologist to enforce Biodiversity Net Gain to new developments

THREATENING NATURE

12% ▲ 6 versus 2023
of councils are pesticide free

24% ▲ 7 versus 2023
of councils have a tree cover target and a tree management plan

5% No change versus 2023
of planning authorities have set a higher minimum standard than the 10% Biodiversity Net Gain for new developments

Buildings & Heating

Local authorities' leading role in decarbonising homes

By **Alastair Mumford**
Programmes Director, The MCS Foundation



19 million homes across the UK will need to have their energy efficiency upgraded through retrofitting if we are to meet our climate targets. The scale of that challenge is significant, and local authorities are at the forefront of engaging households in the transition.

The Climate Action Scorecards show that while 67% of single-tier and 81% of county councils received full marks for being part of a programme or partnership to support home retrofitting, through providing the skills and training needed or in other ways, only 32% of district councils do. The transition to low-carbon heating will require councils at all levels to work with local stakeholders to coordinate engagement with and support for their residents.

The MCS Foundation is working with local authorities to support them in developing partnerships and strategies that can support such engagement, through the pilot of the **Local Area**

Case study:

Surrey, Hertfordshire, East Midlands & Liverpool

Four local authority areas - Surrey, Hertfordshire, East Midland Combined Counties, and Liverpool City Region – are piloting the LARA programme. These areas are developing strategies that bring together key retrofit stakeholders in their area, including landlords, training providers, employers, and other anchor institutions, to agree a vision for retrofit in the area and interventions to deliver it.

Retrofit Accelerator Pilot. The pilot will enable stakeholders to co-create a strategy for accelerating the uptake of retrofit measures in homes locally. The retrofit plans delivered under LARA will provide an opportunity to leverage additional investment from private, public and third sectors, increasing the capacity of the retrofit system at the local level. The learnings from these pilots will provide a roadmap for other local authorities to follow.

Beyond the potential for leveraging in additional funding, developing a local retrofit strategy can help build trust among communities. The move to carbon-free homes, which will require homes to have electric heating like heat pumps, must be built on trust. Yet research **commissioned by The MCS Foundation** has found that nearly half of the public feel that the transition is being done to them, not something they are choosing. Local authorities have a vital role to play in countering this perception - ensuring that retrofitting programmes are trusted and leave no one behind.

Leaving no one behind also means ensuring that all households can afford their energy. This requires Government action. Most importantly, the Government must reduce electricity prices. Currently, the artificially high cost of electricity poses a disincentive to households exploring getting a low-carbon heat pump, even though heat pumps can be three or four times more efficient than a gas boiler.

The fairest way of reducing electricity costs would be for the Government to move social and environmental levies from household bills into general taxation. These levies make up 18% of an electricity bill and disproportionately affect the poorest and elderly. Moving levies off electricity could see savings of £300 a year for households with electric heating - that is, heat pumps, as well as electric radiators and fan heaters.

Reducing the cost of electricity is the biggest single action that the Government can take to support local councils in tackling fuel poverty and accelerating the decarbonisation of homes. We need action now.

Buildings & Heating

Buildings and Heating is one of the biggest sectors of carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions in the UK. This section covers the main actions that local authorities can take to support privately owned and rented homes and social housing to reduce the emissions from their homes. This section also covers what combined authorities can do to create green jobs in their area.

2025 average score and 2023 comparison

by council type

54%	Single Tier	▲ 5
48%	District	▲ 6
69%	County	▼ 1
29%	Northern Ireland	▼ 4
75%	Combined Authority	▲ 15

While averages have increased for most questions since 2023, average scores have decreased for county councils and in Northern Ireland. Improvements can be seen in capacity on retrofitting and council owned social housing. However, only 51% of UK councils have a renewable energy tariff or generate renewable energy equal to 20% of their own energy use, this is less than previously assessed.

LEADING THE WAY · LOCAL AUTHORITIES

72% ▲ 13 versus 2023
have at least 1 part-time retrofit staff member

77% ▲ 6 versus 2023
owned social housing is energy efficient, EPC band C or higher

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

52% ▲ 4 versus 2023
of local authorities support residents to collectively purchase renewable energy

52% ▲ 9 versus 2023
of UK homes are energy efficient, rated EPC C* or higher

37%

of responsible councils are conducting investigations or enforcing Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards for privately rented homes in 2023/24

51%

▼ 8 versus 2023

of councils have a renewable energy tariff or generate renewable energy equal to 20% of their own energy use than in 2023

29%

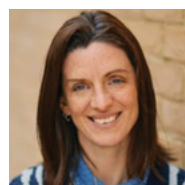
 ▲ 5 versus 2023
of local authorities provide support for local community renewable energy creation



Collaboration & Engagement

The missing piece of the puzzle: effective resident engagement on climate locally

By **Rachael Orr**
CEO, Climate Outreach



Local authorities have a crucial role to play in building support for climate action. They are the backbone of communities. They provide recycling facilities, tree planting schemes, insulation in council homes and grants to businesses for energy efficiency measures. But perhaps more importantly than what councils can do is how they do it.

We know that trust in politics, particularly central Government, is at an all-time low. At Climate Outreach, we heard this loud and clear in our [Britain Talks Climate and Nature](#) research. But because of councils' proximity to communities, there is an opportunity for them to truly involve their residents

in climate action. In 2025, this has never been more vital. Proper consultation and engagement with residents cannot be an afterthought, it must be done from the beginning if we are to bring people with us on our shared climate goals.

The 2025 Scorecards highlight who is doing this consultation and engagement well, with the City of Edinburgh the highest scorer on 93%. Edinburgh scored full marks on so many vital areas of engagement, including on collaboration with business, schools, cultural and health services to reach wider audiences and drive climate action across different sections of society.

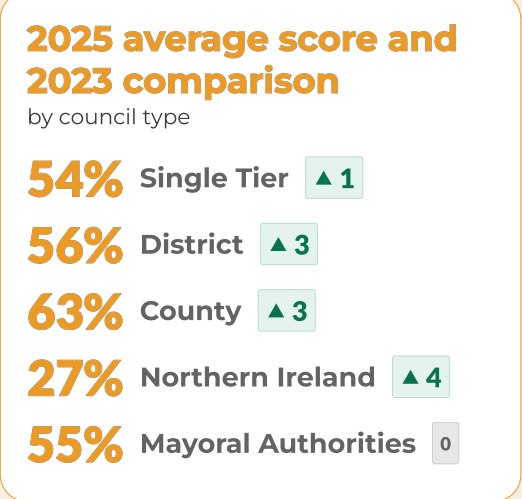
But across the UK, the scores are more mixed. Single tier councils score on average just 54%, representing the smallest percentage increase of all 7 sections, since the 2023 Scorecards. This tells us something vital. Collaboration and engagement on climate is still something they struggle to finance and devote sufficient attention towards. More support for them to change this is crucial.

However, there is cause for optimism in the data. 87% of councils have now published a Climate Action Plan, and many councils are working in partnership with schools, businesses and health services to drive ambitious climate action.

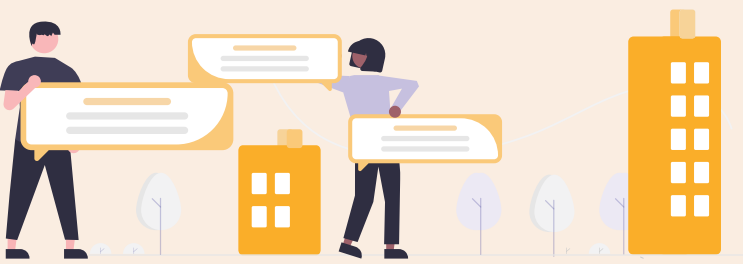
What needs to happen now is a greater recognition that having Climate Plans in place, important though this is, means very little if there are no opportunities for residents to shape them. Just 21% scored full marks for having ongoing ways for residents to influence their council's Climate Plans through in-depth engagement such as a series of workshops, or a working group with community representatives. Let's celebrate the progress and applaud local climate action but recognise that collaboration and engagement is an area where all councils could stand to improve their offer to residents.

Collaboration & Engagement

This section addresses how councils can collaborate with others to improve their own climate action and to support others in the area to decarbonise. More than half of the emissions cuts needed to reach net zero rely on people and businesses taking up low-carbon solutions, and councils can work with those in their local area to enable those solutions.



While average scores have increased since 2023 across most council types and for most questions, UK local authorities have lobbied the UK Government less than they did in 2023. We also observed that during the assessment period there had been no new partnerships between local authorities and health services.



Governance & Finance

The importance of embedding climate action across the whole council

By **David Dale**
Policy Officer, ADEPT



The Scorecards Governance and Finance section explores to what extent climate action has been embedded across the whole council, which is vital in securing climate positive action across the whole organisation.

There is much room for improvement, but it is great to see significant progress across all council types compared with the previous results.

Decision-making is a positive area – the vast majority of councils have a climate portfolio holder and most have a process for highlighting climate implications when making decisions. However, it is disappointing to see that the number of councils including climate as a main priority in their Corporate Plan and training all their senior members and officers in climate awareness has fallen slightly and there is no obvious reason for this.

Case study: Westminster

In 2023, Westminster City Council, in partnership with Abundance Investment, launched Westminster Green Investment, an initiative that enabled residents to directly invest in local green projects. The response was remarkable - £1 million was raised in just nine days, making it the fastest of any UK council. The funds have been used to deliver impactful upgrades, including the installation of solar PV panels, LED lighting, and a heat pump.

This innovative funding model not only accelerates climate action but also strengthens community engagement by giving residents a meaningful stake in Westminster's future and a direct role in driving local net zero ambitions.

There is a mixed picture on finance: most councils have raised funds for their local climate action programme using various methods including bonds and municipal investments and other income-generating schemes. However, it is proving considerably more difficult to move investments away from supporting high carbon infrastructure and industries. Only a minority of councils have passed a motion in support of divesting their pension fund from fossil fuels, and only 2% have committed to doing so by 2030.

Procurement is a key power that local authorities can use to deliver decarbonisation. Approximately half of local government spending is through procurement, while procured goods and services can make up 70-80% of a council's total emissions due to large contracts for waste management, highways maintenance, construction, and facilities management.

Despite some encouraging improvements over the last two years the outlook is unclear. Nationally and locally, the political consensus on reducing emissions has started to shift. Since the May 2025 local elections, a number of Reform UK controlled councils are reviewing or reversing their climate policies, removing net zero targets and diverting funding from climate action projects. It remains to be seen whether other councils will follow suit and what impact this might have on wider policies, including those around warmer homes and active travel.

Local authorities are ready and willing to drive climate action. A place-based approach is an essential and cost-effective way of delivering clean growth, securing a fair transition to a low carbon economy, and building resilient infrastructure and communities. We need the Government to strengthen the Local Government Outcomes Framework to include climate outcomes, and to use the devolution agenda to bring in properly funded statutory duties on councils and strategic authorities to tackle the climate and nature emergencies.

Governance & Finance

This section looks at the extent climate action has been incorporated and embedded across the whole of a council in all its activities and services, including in its decision making, forward planning and governing and reporting structures. It also looks at how councils are raising funds for climate action and whether the councils' investments are sustainable or supporting high carbon infrastructure and industries.

2025 average score and 2023 comparison

by council type

34% Single Tier ▲ 7

31% District ▲ 7

38% County ▲ 4

19% Northern Ireland ▲ 8

33% Combined Authority ▲ 4

There have been a number of improvements, with the number of councils reporting at least a 20% emission decrease in their operations improving and councils continuing to include climate within their decision making process. However, councils continue to struggle to see emissions reduce and move investments away from funding the climate crisis.

LEADING THE WAY



88% ▲ 20 versus 2023
of local authorities have raised funds for climate action



86% ▲ 2 versus 2023
of councils have a named climate portfolio holder

FUNDING THE CLIMATE CRISIS



10% No change versus 2023
of local authorities have direct investments in airports

2% have committed to divesting their pension fund from fossil fuels by 2030

while 13% of councils have passed a motion supporting divestment



CLIMATE GOVERNANCE



40% ▼ 5 versus 2023
of councils included climate as a priority in their Corporate Plan

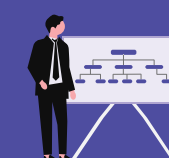


61% ▲ 14 versus 2023
of councils list climate implications on full council decisions

15% adopting a detailed climate impact assessment tool for decisions

10% ▼ 4 versus 2023

of councils have trained all their senior staff and cabinet or committee chair in climate awareness



EMISSION REDUCTIONS, BETWEEN 2019 AND 2022



19% ▲ 12 versus 2023
of councils have reduced their own emissions by 20% or more



50%
of councils have had area wide emission reductions by 10% or more



Planning & Land Use

Policy to Practice: Embedding Net Zero in Local Plans

By **Larry Tate**
Project & Comms Coordinator, Good Homes Alliance



The scorecards show that many councils are beginning to rise to the challenge, with a growing number adopting ambitious net zero standards for new developments. Compared with previous years, there has been a clear step forward, with councils proving that robust policies can be developed, justified, and delivered. Early adopters have shown that collaboration with communities, developers, and neighbouring authorities can produce credible, workable plans. This progress demonstrates what is possible, even with limited resources and complex regulations.

Despite this, many councils have yet to embed even remotely ambitious, net zero policies in their plans. Almost every UK council has declared a climate emergency, with targets to reach net zero by 2050, and many aiming for 2030. Yet the built environment remains one of the biggest contributors to carbon emissions, through both

construction and energy use. Councils should be using their planning powers to cut this impact.

Local authorities already have the tools to act. The Planning & Energy Act 2008 allows councils to set local energy efficiency standards beyond building regulations and require a share of energy from local renewable or low-carbon sources. The Town & Country Planning Act 1990 enables Section 106 obligations, used in some areas for carbon offsetting. Councils can also issue Local Development Orders to accelerate renewable energy projects, low-carbon networks, and retrofits..

Some authorities are leading the way, but others must strengthen their approach. Sharing knowledge and lessons learned will be vital. Proven approaches in one area can often be adapted elsewhere, saving time and building confidence among members, officers, and developers.

For further progress, government support and leadership is essential. DESNZ and MHCLG must back councils that want to go beyond building regulations. While the Future Homes Standard is expected to raise the baseline, Government should make clear that councils are free to set higher standards where justified, avoiding restrictive interpretations of the 2023 Written Ministerial Statement.

Government must also help under-resourced councils that want to act but lack capacity. A national strategy is needed for what follows the Future Homes Standard, ensuring that ambition continues to rise in line with the UK's legally binding 2050 target. Accelerating the decarbonisation of the electricity grid will also be vital, since many net zero housing strategies depend on clean, affordable energy.

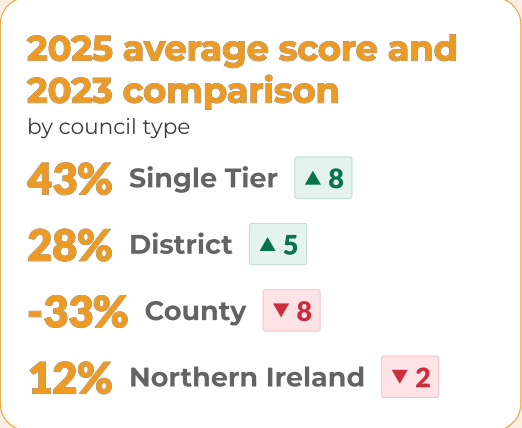
Case study: Cornwall

Cornwall Council were among the first to consult on ambitious policies for space heating demand and operational carbon in their local plan DPD. These policies have been in place for over two years, with no reduction in planning applications despite early fears. Success has been built on a robust evidence base (developed with Bath & North East Somerset), comprehensive training for officers and developers, and a managed transition period. Crucially, the planning team has shared their experience with other authorities, providing a valuable model for embedding and delivering ambitious net zero housing policies.

Planning & Land Use

Planning powers are the most under-utilised climate tool a local authority has. Planning policy determines where new homes are built, the standards they are built to and how people will travel in their community; locking in their greenhouse gas emissions for decades.

Most of the questions in this section only apply to councils that are “planning authorities”, which are English district councils, Northern Irish districts, and all single-tier authorities, including in Wales and Scotland.



The growth in renewable energy projects is clear, as well as improvements in onsite renewable energy and over half of councils that own/manage housing committing to stronger standards. However, the vast majority of new development is still lacking, while embodied emissions continue to go unchecked.

GREEN AND WARMER HOMES

53% of authorities that own or manage housing have committed to building new housing to a high energy efficiency or operationally net zero standard

52% ▲ 6 versus 2023 of planning authorities require onsite renewable energy in new developments

STRONGER STANDARDS NEEDED

21% ▲ 2 versus 2023 of planning authorities require the measurement of a development's embodied emissions

18% ▲ 4 versus 2023 of planning authorities have set net zero standards for building new housing

FOSSIL FUELS VS RENEWABLE ENERGY

65% ▲ 7 versus 2023 of planning authorities have mapped where new solar, wind or district heating infrastructure can be built

⚠ but only 11% have mapped for all three

57% ▲ 24 versus 2023 of British local authorities have approved 3 or more renewable energy projects

8 mineral planning authorities have approved new, or the expansion, of fossil fuel infrastructure

Transport

On route to Greener Transport

By **Silviya Barrett**
Director of Policy and Campaigns,
Campaign for Better Transport



Local authorities play a pivotal role in shaping how people travel. Their decisions on where to invest limited funding directly impacts the transport choices available for people's everyday journeys – and the resulting carbon footprint.

The shift to electric vehicles (EVs), alongside choosing walking, wheeling, public and shared transport for more journeys, are both central for making progress on climate action.

The latest Scorecards suggest that, while improvements have been made across a range of council types, much of the improvements remain largely focused on cars. A clear example of this is the rapid expansion of public EV charging infrastructure, with a 40% increase in councils that have at least sixty public EV chargers compared with 2023. This growth provides reassurance to EV owners to be able to charge on the go and helps encourage further uptake. However, many residents are either unable to afford to buy an EV, or do not have access to home

Case study: Norwich

Norfolk county council, working in partnership with Norwich City Council, provides an excellent example of a council supporting shared transport, having achieved full marks in this area. The council supports schemes including car clubs, shared electric bikes via Beryl, shared moped hire, and shop mobility aid hire. Norwich has also expanded its' Active Travel provision and is working with Living Streets to improve walkability. By providing affordable, convenient car alternatives, shared mobility is essential for reducing car use and increasing the feasibility of multi-modal travel.

charging options, suppressing demand. Even across councils themselves, transitioning to EVs has been slow, with almost three quarters of councils having less than 10% of their own fleet as electric. Given their fleets have a much higher proportion of EVs, enabling car clubs is an effective way to expand EV use to more people, while at the same time reducing the need to own a car, thus contributing to air pollution and congestion reduction too. Yet, more remains to be done on this front, with only a few councils having a car club in their area.

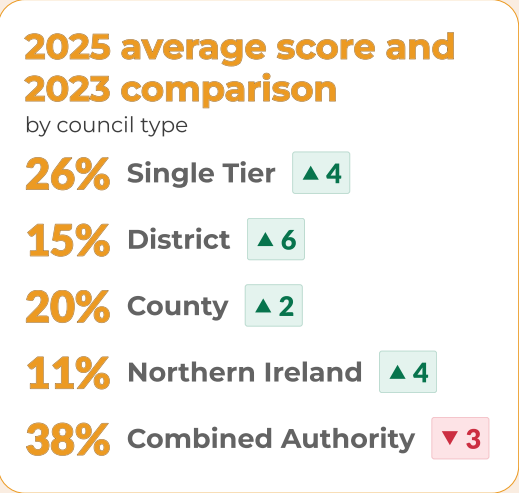
Enabling the use of public transport, walking and cycling for more journeys remains the most effective decarbonisation tool. Unfortunately, progress has been much more limited. While the 7% growth in transport authorities with low-emission buses in their area is welcome, only 12 transport authorities outside of London reported what are considered high levels of bus ridership. Progress on active travel and 20mph default speed limits has also been limited, as many local leaders tend to see such interventions as politically difficult.

Another worrying development is that almost a quarter of local authorities have expanded, or approved expansion of, airport or road capacity – with central government backing. Both encourage greater use of highly polluting travel modes and actively go against decarbonisation efforts.

With rail and bus reform under way, and the upcoming Integrated National Transport Strategy, there is potential for a greater policy impetus for the delivery of an improved system that reduces car dependency and makes sustainable travel the easy choice for everyone. With devolution and local government reorganisation happening at the same, this presents a potential opportunity of greater empowerment but also a risk of disruption at the local level. It is important that newly formed local authorities take a whole-systems approach to transport, backed by robust national policy and funding structures with sustainability at their heart.

Transport

Transport is one of the biggest contributors of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK. This section covers the main enabling actions councils can take to reduce car use and encourage more sustainable transport within their area. Most of the questions in transport only apply to councils that are “transport authorities”, which have the powers over the transport network in their area. In the UK these councils are county councils, all single-tier authorities and the English Mayoral authorities.



While average scores have increased for most council types, with the improvement most noticeably seen in EV charging infrastructure, UK local authorities are continuing to lag behind on the decarbonisation of transport, with slow improvements seen in electric vehicles in council fleet, bus ridership, active travel infrastructure and shared mobility schemes.

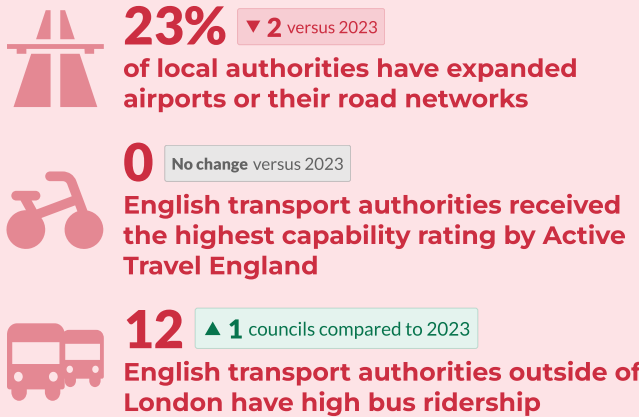
LEADING THE WAY



STALLED ACTION



DRIVING THE CLIMATE CRISIS



AIR QUALITY



Waste Reduction & Food

Every Mouthful Counts: Food for the Planet

By **Leon Ballin**
Programme Manager, Sustainable Food Places



Given that the food system is responsible for around one third of all carbon emissions, there is growing frustration at the pace of change from businesses and national governments. In the UK some local authorities have taken matters into their own hands. The Climate Report for 2025 shows that many councils are taking their role in the climate emergency seriously but others are lagging behind. Of course external pressures must be acknowledged especially budgetary pressures on councils and the cost-of-living crisis on citizens. Even so, those places that are showing best practice can be replicated in other local authority areas and the **Sustainable Food Places** movement recommends that collaboration between local authorities is an effective way to raise the bar.

A closer look at some of the statistics in this year's report can reveal both threats and opportunities for councils to use their powers and budgets to enable

food as a positive force to combat harmful climate change.

Kerbside food recycling has dropped to 2023 levels leaving only until the end of 2026 for all councils to meet their legal deadline. With 60% of local authorities providing this service it is likely having a statutory duty in the near future has helped stop further reductions. Statutory duties for other actions that promote sustainable food and reduce food waste would really make the difference and should be advocated for. Councils and MPs actively supporting Defra's '**Good Food Cycle**' approach is a positive first step.

It is noteworthy that districts are falling behind unitary authorities and this is likely due to those areas having weak powers over waste and public health. The English Devolution Bill will change this political landscape fundamentally and Sustainable Food Places advocates for having food as a statutory duty to ensure new unitary and combined authorities develop food strategies to overcome food waste and ensure a healthy and nutritious diet for all.

It is positive to see an increase in support for food growing. This will be in part to the momentum the '**Right to Grow**' campaign has sparked and it is expected many councils will follow in the footsteps of Hull and Bury to declare the Right to Grow.



Waste Reduction & Food

This section looks at how local authorities support sustainable food production on their land and promote sustainable food choices in their schools. Local authorities* also play a key role in supporting local circular economy initiatives, as well as improving waste collection and recycling rates.

2025 average score and 2023 comparison

by council type

49% Single Tier **▲ 12**

34% District **▲ 11**

50% County **▲ 20**

51% Northern Ireland **▲ 16**

While average scores have increased since 2023, recycling rates have decreased for a number of councils during the assessment period. We also observed councils discontinuing their free food waste collection services due to budgetary pressures, cancelling out progress made elsewhere.



LEADING THE WAY



82% **▲ 25** versus 2023
support community food growing initiatives



62% **▲ 19** versus 2023
support food surplus redistributions initiatives

64% **▲ 26** versus 2023
of local authorities support circular economy initiatives



SINGLE TIER AND COUNTY COUNCILS



48% **▲ 24** versus 2023
provide at least one complete vegetarian day in schools each week

60% of local authorities provide kerbside food waste recycling to most homes



Same as 2023 despite the April 2026 legal deadline for all councils in the UK to recycle food waste.

FALLING BEHIND - LOCAL AUTHORITIES



28% **▲ 16** versus 2023
have a sustainable food strategy



27% **▼ 3** versus 2023
recycle more than half of their waste from residents



93%
send to landfill or incinerate over 300kg of waste per household each year



Find out more about your
council's climate action at
councilclimatescorecards.uk

climateemergency.uk

