CLIMATE EMERGENCY UK

# Scorecards Successes:

## What factors enable climate action within UK local authorities?

March 2024

# About

## Climate Emergency UK

At **Climate Emergency UK** we seek to inspire and support those pushing for local climate action across the climate movement and within councils to reach net zero at the pace and scale needed. We facilitate peer-learning across the climate movement and within councils and provide knowledge and skills to those campaigning, working or lobbying for local climate action. We educate campaigners, councillors, council staff and other stakeholders on how councils work and how to advocate for and accelerate council climate action, providing knowledge, data tools, and skills to those campaigning, working or lobbying for local climate action.

## Anthesis

Anthesis is the Sustainability Activator. **Proud to be a B Corp**, we are the largest group of dedicated sustainability experts in the world: a team of 900+ people, working across seventeen countries, to serve more than 800 clients. We exist to shape a more productive and resilient world by helping organisations transition to new models of sustainable performance. Our team combines broad and deep sustainability expertise with the commercial and operational capabilities it takes to conceive and deliver real change.

Anthesis has significant experience supporting local authorities who have declared a climate emergency and are working towards net zero. Anthesis are the developers of the **SCATTER** tool, used by over 300 councils and DESNZ funded, it allows for greenhouse gas reporting and is aligned with international frameworks. Anthesis has established a formal partnership with CDP, a global not-for-profit organisation that helps companies and cities disclose their environmental impact, to become its first UK Cities Accredited Solutions Provider. Anthesis has also performed bespoke support services in response to the climate emergency with over 40 local authorities. This includes delivering detailed environmental baselining analysis, CAPs and engagement workshops with council stakeholders including local politicians, council officers, citizens, and businesses.

CLIMATE EMERGENCY UK

Anthesis

# Foreword

## Scorecards Successes: What factors enable climate action within UK local authorities?

As local government officers and councillors working tirelessly to deliver the necessary climate action we need to see from local councils, we are grateful to Climate Emergency UK and Anthesis for this Scorecards analysis report.

Climate Emergency UK is the first organisation to holistically assess all UK councils on their climate action in their 2023 **Council Climate Action Scorecards** (in partnership with **mySociety**). Anthesis, who have a wealth of experience supporting local authorities working towards net zero and are the developers of the SCATTER tool that many councils use, are well-placed to explore the Scorecards data in more detail, as they have done in this report. This report builds on the benchmarking work of the Scorecards by providing detail on what are the enablers and characteristics within local authorities that can help accelerate local climate action.

Despite the UK Government setting a net zero target of 2050, there is little national guidance from and support from the UK government for how councils can deliver and enable action towards net zero emissions. This report provides some of this advice and guidance for councils, while demonstrating the relative impactfulness of these actions, which will help councils prioritise the actions to work on. For example, the report shows how councils with a portfolio holder or committee lead for climate and those that secure external funding for climate action do better across the board on their work towards net zero.

The report concludes with recommendations for national government, local government and local communities (including local businesses). This is a helpful reminder that partnerships are key; national and local governments, businesses and communities all need to play their part in combatting and adapting to the climate crisis.

One of the other report's recommendations calls for climate action to be a fully-funded duty for local authorities. This report demonstrates that good governance, including decision making processes, risk registers incorporating climate risks, being able to report on emissions and access to funding are key factors that enable council climate action, and these cannot be done without additional national guidance and resources.

Climate Emergency UK continues to use the data it collects in the Scorecards to advocate for further local and national action. This report is one of many tools that can be used to leverage effective climate action across the UK, to encourage collaboration and action on decarbonisation from local authorities and, crucially, to demonstrate the importance of and advocate for central government support to accelerate local action.

We hope you find this report useful in illuminating how far local authorities have come to meeting their own climate emergency goals and how much further we have to go.

**Signatories**

**Cllr Marianne Overton MBE** – Chair of the Independent Group and Vice-Chair of the Local Government Association, and Lincolnshire County and North Kesteven District Councillor.

**Cllr Karen Davies** – Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Biodiversity and Windsor Town Council at the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

**Jon Burke MIEMA CEnv** – Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead, Gloucester City Council.

# Contents

# Introduction

**UK local authorities have been demonstrating leadership on climate with over 300 councils having declared a climate emergency since 2018, and many setting a target to be net zero by 2030. 275 councils have proceeded to develop a Climate Action Plan (CAP) to provide strategic direction on how they will meet their target. Whilst demonstrating strong commitment, this now needs to be followed with on-the-ground decarbonisation and resilience projects, behaviour change including ways of working, and finance flows towards low carbon initiatives.**

Climate Emergency UK have assessed all UK councils on their progress towards net zero, to see what progress councils are making beyond just making a declaration. According to Climate Emergency UK's detailed criteria of the Action Scorecards, only 41 councils in the UK scored 50% or more for their climate action, with the average score being just over 30%. With most UK councils underperforming, national barriers were identified as a key reason for underperformance.

Local authorities are typically **only directly responsible for between 2-5% of their local area's emissions**. However, estimates suggest that councils have powers of influence over a much larger proportion - **over one third of UK emissions** – and can use these powers to deliver significant climate action. Councils can use their planning powers, duties to manage risk and protect vulnerable populations, financial borrowing powers and convening abilities to help leverage and influence decarbonisation whilst building local resilience. It should be noted that this remains a challenge with councils facing increasing **budgetary challenges and shortfalls** that limit what services they can provide.

With increased pressure to deliver on their climate targets, and ongoing financial and resource pressures, understanding where councils need to prioritise action is critical. The aim of this report is to assess what enablers and characteristics can help accelerate local climate action. By understanding which actions councils can take that will lead to further action, councils can prioritise the most impactful activities, structures, and policies to implement.

**The UK's Climate Change Committee's latest assessment on progress towards reaching net zero shows that urgent action is needed to meet our 2030 interim targets.** We know that no one stakeholder can achieve net zero alone. We need everyone in society to play their part from national to local government, businesses, community groups and citizens. By understanding and assessing the extent to which different factors drive action, this report provides recommendations to these stakeholders on how they can help unlock barriers to stronger progress.

In this report the analysis on the Council Climate Action Scorecards has been broken down into 3 chapters.

- **Large scale trends:** This chapter discusses the strengths and weaknesses of different councils in each Scorecard section and provides insight into a council's overall performance.
- **Council governance:** This chapter examines the impact of specific "internal" characteristics and actions to determine their effectiveness in improving a council's score.
- **Enabling factors:** This chapter reviews enabling factors that councils have less control over to understand the impact they have on a council's score.

# Key findings of the report:

Our research shows that the following actions taken by a council are the most effective in driving further action:

- **Council governance: demonstrating continued political support for climate action through appointment of a dedicated portfolio holder has a hugely positive impact on Climate Action Scorecards results.** Climate emergency declarations across UK local authorities signified a political turning point for local leadership on climate and those councils with a defined political representative responsible for climate change activities perform far better than those without. Councils demonstrating increased political commitment through a more ambitious target year for decarbonisation also performed well above average.

- **Council governance: enabling accountability and scrutiny through up-to-date publication of climate strategies and emissions reporting are both strong indicators of the delivery of climate actions.** When councils are performing well on climate, they tend to have a clearly defined strategic plan and invite feedback and engagement from all stakeholders through public monitoring and reporting channels. Public reporting of council and area-wide emissions and the associated scrutiny that brings is also associated with higher scores. Targeted devolved policies, such as the Scottish mandate for emissions reporting, are likely to have played a part in encouraging climate action, reflected in higher average scores in Scotland.

The analysis shows that these enabling factors are significant in helping to accelerate climate action:

- **Council governance: small numbers of councils who are innovating climate finance mechanisms to directly fund climate action all performed significantly better in sections of the Scorecards relating to "direct" emissions reduction.** While only a few councils have taken this action (likely because this is a new initiative for many councils and therefore requires external guidance), there is evidence to suggest that it directly improves a council's ability to work on climate in many areas. In the interim, we can see many more councils working with the private sector; this practice correlates with a higher score across all areas of the Council Climate Action Scorecards. While this is a step in the right direction, launching a fund is a highly impactful action that very few councils have adopted.

- **Enabling factor: operating within strong stakeholder networks results in strong outcomes for climate action.** Even if resources are limited, councils that were able to establish strong partnerships were still demonstrating significant local climate action. While it is preferable to have internal staff resources within the council, using external networks while budgets are constrained can help with collaboration and leverage resources.

- **Enabling factor: there is regional and structural variation in the success of councils responding to the climate and ecological emergency.** The stronger overall scores of combined authority councils compared to their constituent local authorities raises questions about how efficiently climate action is being implemented and coordinated within combined authority structures. Generally, county councils and combined authorities outscored single-tier and district councils and especially the individual scores of single-tier and district councils who are combined authority members.

# Recommendations

## The UK and devolved governments need to:

- **Provide clarity and leadership on climate change.** Current national policies are not sufficient to meet our current net zero targets. National government needs to increase its ambition on climate and bring forward regulation noting the urgency to meet their 2030 emissions target. Emissions reductions have mostly occurred from the decarbonisation of the National Grid, but we need other sectors to start acting. Local governments need clear and coherent national policy to unlock the barriers to national funding, exercise their powers, and put in place impactful climate policies.

- **Make area-wide climate action a statutory duty for all UK local authorities, with corresponding funding.** Scottish authorities on average score higher in the Scorecards than the rest of the UK, in large part due to the statutory net zero duty for Scottish councils. Furthermore, of the 52 councils that score 20% or below in the Scorecards, 49 are English and Northern Irish councils, nations that have no statutory duty for councils to act on climate. This was also recommended in the Skidmore's, ***The Future Is Local Report***, which stated that by introducing a statutory duty, and properly funding it, the Government would give the same weight to local climate action as social care or bin collections. A statutory duty would give officers and councillors UK wide the authority to drive forward decarbonisation as a key priority. It would allow for long-term staff provision, project delivery infrastructure and a requirement for an elected climate portfolio holder. Emissions reporting should then be implemented as part of the statutory duty, using similar area-wide reporting frameworks across the UK for climate action as the one existing in Scotland.

- **Fund council climate action by increasing access to net zero funding and provide long-term, simplified and greater funding for local net zero projects**. Since 2019, councils have spent £130 million on applying for short-term competitive funding pots, which is wasted if they are not successful, exacerbating inequalities between different local authorities. Our findings demonstrate that councils that have been able to access longer-term funding, and who have set up climate funds, are taking increasingly more action. National governments need to help unlock the barriers councils face by launching new financial mechanisms and enabling public-private partnerships that unlocks investment. The UK government should follow the example of trailblazer devolution deals in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.

- **Provide targeted support to Northern Irish councils to bring their performance in line with the rest of the UK**, such as strategic advisory support to better align governance arrangements with climate ambitions, and support on transport related decarbonisation.

## Local government needs to:

- **Ensure there is clear political leadership within the local council to help drive forward this agenda.** By having a climate portfolio holder with a clear understanding of the importance of working on climate change, they can help implement a clear vision, create partnerships, and leverage resources.

- **Set science-based targets and track progress against a climate action plan.** Following the lead from a number of councils, ensure that more councils are setting ambitious targets and developing action plans that are then embedded across the council. These targets and plans should use standards set out by international, such as *Greenhouse Gas Protocol for Cities*) or national reporting frameworks, such as the *Environmental Reporting Guidelines from DEFRA* or the ***Greenhouse Gas Accounting Tool from the LGA)*** or follow the national legislation on reporting in place in Scotland, to ensure consistency and transparency.

- **Develop effective climate governance and engagement arrangements, especially in combined authorities.** The analysis has shown that local authorities within combined authorities scored relatively poorly on their efforts to engage with businesses and to provide funding for community action. Further coordination and alignment may be required to ensure the benefits of the combined authority actions are seen in their local authorities. Meaningful public engagement is an important part of this picture, to ensure local authorities bring local communities with them on the decarbonisation journey.

- **Develop climate-specific financial mechanisms to connect funding for local projects.** Councils need to access and leverage private sector funding through mechanisms such as climate bonds, offsetting/insetting schemes, or other innovative investment funds. This could be used as an engagement tool with local businesses on their own emissions reduction journey.

- **Improve focus on impactful biodiversity actions to bring performance in line with other areas of climate action.** Questions relating to biodiversity net gain for new developments, positive management of conservation areas and increasing tree cover were all answered less well on average compared to other questions and sections. The potential to leverage positive social, environmental and climate co-benefits in these areas is clear. Focusing on natural environment actions is also an effective means of engaging with external groups including businesses and community groups.

## Communities - including residents and local businesses - need to:

- **Ensure that net zero is embedded into the councils' strategies and risk register.** Action on climate needs to be part of authorities' overall strategic planning - not sidelined. Residents can push for further net zero actions such as climate awareness training for all members and senior leaders to ensure that all council projects consider climate and nature implications.

- **Encourage partnerships with local government and engage with their council.** Community groups, residents and local businesses carry vital local knowledge and experience and can help implement net zero projects with a place-based approach. Communities need to both, engage with their council's climate plans and use their connections with marginalised and vulnerable groups to ensure that actions benefit all impacted groups. Local government should also celebrate best practices, and leverage existing actions that communities are delivering on, including in areas such as fuel poverty, improving local biodiversity and clean energy.

- **Maintain political pressure and commitment by supporting councils who demonstrate leadership on climate and hold councils accountable.** Citizens can utilise the Scorecards, this report and the local context to ensure councils implement the highest impact enablers of local climate action. Residents can push for further net zero action such as ensuring climate awareness training for all members and senior leaders and that projects that are taken forward within the council consider the climate impact, in part through embedding net zero targets into council strategies and risk registers. Review the enablers presented in this report as well as the Scorecards result to understand which action your council is not taking and then campaign for the actions achieving the highest impact.

- **Work with education institutions, local businesses and local governments to increase green skills.** In particular local businesses can play an important role in ramping up green skills in areas such as retrofitting. There is an increasing demand for technical expertise to support the green economy. Whilst local authorities are under-resourced, and under-skilled, they will need to leverage the private sector in helping to deliver net zero projects.

- **Support local governments to access private financing by providing technical assistance and advice on how to best leverage public finance.** Councils can be limited in their capacity to manage low-carbon projects, but that should not be a barrier to the private and third sectors acting as project developers or funders

# Methodology

This report was commissioned by Climate Emergency UK with analysis conducted by Anthesis (UK) Ltd. It is based on the results of the Council Climate Action Scorecards which were published in October 2023. To produce the Scorecards, Climate Emergency UK marked and scored all UK councils on their climate action on their performance against up to 91 questions in 7 different sections. Questions were asked relating to the following areas of climate action:

- **Buildings & Heating**
- **Transport**
- **Planning & Land Use**
- **Governance & Finance**
- **Biodiversity**
- **Collaboration & Engagement**
- **Waste Reduction & Food**

Similar Scorecards were produced for the ten English combined authorities, along with the Greater London Authority, with amendments made to some sections and questions as appropriate. Each council was marked against the **methodology** and was given a Right of Reply, with 74% of councils responding, before the scores underwent a final audit.

In this report we compare the effects of different "characteristics" of councils on their performance within the Scorecards. Some characteristics relate to common actions and decisions taken by councils, such as the appointment of a dedicated climate portfolio holder, or setting a target for Net Zero that is more ambitious than the UK's 2050 national target. Others relate to more fundamental characteristics of a council, such as their membership of a combined authority, or whether they are in a rural or urban area.

To do this, we compare the scores of those councils "with" a characteristic against the scores of councils "without" that characteristic across different sections and questions. This is a three-step process, with an example shown in Table 1 below:

1. **Calculating baseline scores:** Each Scorecard section and question is benchmarked according to the points scored by all councils, as a proportion of the maximum number of points available. Some questions are well answered by all councils, resulting in a high proportion of total available marks being scored (up to 95% in some cases). Some questions are answered poorly by all councils – the lowest record around 1% of available marks. We call this percentage the "baseline" score which allows us to identify which sections and questions are generally answered well and poorly.

2. **Splitting into two groups:** Councils are then split into two groups according to criteria which assess whether a council has a given characteristic or not. In many cases the criteria is defined by a council's answer to a Scorecard question which is directly linked to a characteristic e.g. one question asks whether a council has a dedicated climate portfolio holder, which easily separates the councils into two groups – those that score a mark on this question and those that do not. An example of an alternative criteria might be the way we distinguish between urban and rural local authorities, which we have done by applying ONS classifications for each council.

3. **Comparing performance between groups:**
The performance of each group is then measured for each section and question and compared. This is done in the same way as Step 1, where the percentage of points that have been scored is calculated as a proportion of available points for each group. This allows us to directly compare the performance of groups with and without a characteristic and make observations on the impact of different characteristics on scores. To compare like-for-like as much as possible across council types that have different powers, we have used the weighted section scores to compare trends in overall scores.

This approach also allows us to identify which characteristics help improve council scores best and define a hierarchy of recommended activities.

Whilst a useful means of comparing between characteristics, we stop short of drawing conclusions that suggest causation between a characteristic and a good scoring outcome on a specific question. Instead, we observe the relationship between characteristics and scores and try to define what else might be at play or provide an explanation based on additional supporting evidence to inform recommendations. This approach also allows us to identify which characteristics help improve council scores best and define a hierarchy of recommended activities.

**Example:**

| Step | Does the council have a staff member employed to work on retrofitting across the council area? | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Group criteria** | **Number of councils** | **Average score** |
| **1.** | Total number of responding councils | **377** | **59%** |
| **2.** | All councils WITH a dedicated climate portfolio holder (i.e. councils with the characteristic) | **317** | **62%** |
| | All WITHOUT a dedicated climate portfolio holder (i.e. councils without the characteristic) | **60** | **43%** |
| **3.** | **Difference in scores between councils with and without climate portfolio holders** | | **+19%** |

Table 1: Example of our characteristic assessment methodology for the climate portfolio holder characteristic, applied to a question on building retrofits. The data suggests that councils with climate portfolio holders are much more likely to also have staff specifically employed to work on retrofitting, as they have scored a much higher proportion of points available on this question.

# Chapter 1:
# Large Scale Trends

From the analysis of the Scorecards, large-scale trends were identified across the seven sections, each covering a different area of climate action response. This chapter will discuss the overall strengths and weaknesses of different councils in each Scorecard section and allow us to draw general conclusions on council performance.

## Summary of Scorecards results

Across all UK single, district, and county councils, the average Council Climate Action Scorecards score was around 30%. Fewer than one in ten councils scored above 50% of available marks. Combined authorities scored much higher on average, achieving average scores of around 46%.

Performance across each section varied widely. Councils scored more favourably across Buildings & Heating and Collaboration & Engagement sections, recording an average of just under 50% of available marks in both sections. This was also reflected in the performance of combined authorities, who scored well in their equivalent sections, on average between 55-60%.

Conversely, in some sections many councils scored poorly. Transport questions were poorly scored by most local authorities, with the average Scorecard recording just 16% of available marks. The most poorly scored section in the combined authority Scorecard was Governance & Finance, which recorded just 29% of available marks.

It should be noted that the weighting of each section varies according to the type of council and its nation within the UK (see the methodology **here**), but it is clear that councils are performing better in delivering some areas of climate action than others.

## Scorecards questions review

When looking into the individual questions that scored proportionally very well, we can see that the most common climate actions taken by a large majority of councils are:

- Providing services and funding to homeowners to improve their energy efficiency[1]
- Publishing a CAP with defined SMART targets[2]
- Appointing a political representative to manage climate change as part of a portfolio of responsibilities[3]
- Committing to less of mowing council green spaces to protect wildlife[4]

1. Buildings & Heating, Question 9.
2. Collaboration & Engagement, Question 2a.
3. Governance & Finance, Question 7.
4. Biodiversity, Question 3.

Other questions were answered much more poorly, recording hardly any positive responses. The following actions are being taken by very few councils, with each question scoring less than 5% of available marks:

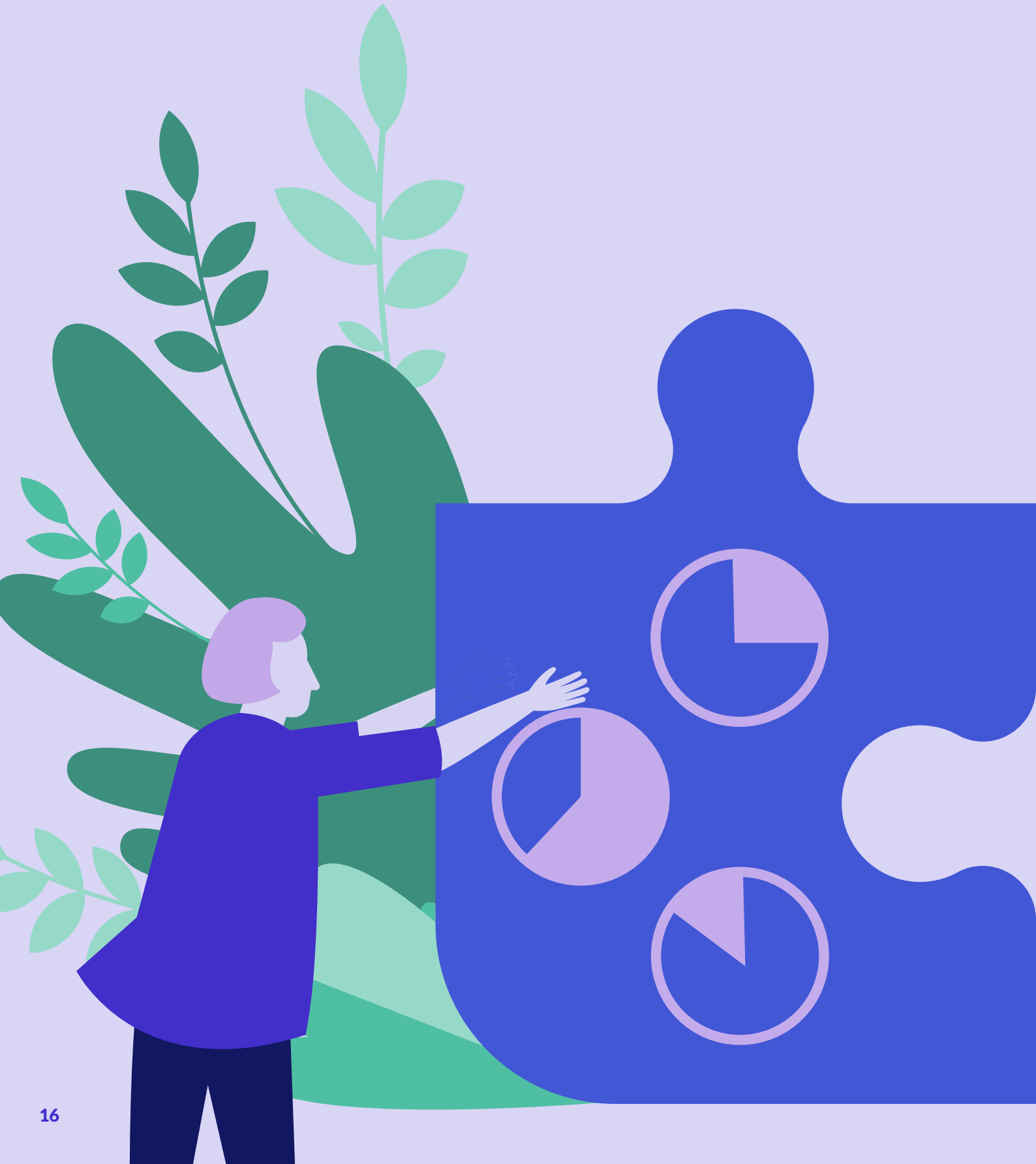
- Divestment of council pension funds from fossil fuels[5]
- Banning high carbon advertising and sponsorship[6]
- Launching a climate bond or community municipal investment[7]
- Amending requirements for new building developments to accommodate stronger commitments to biodiversity net gain[8]
- Limiting air pollution below World Health Organisation guidelines[9]

An emergent theme from this analysis is the idea that actions that represent low-hanging fruit have been widely adopted and actions that relate to long-term planning and strategic development are common. Further, actions that also bring the added benefit of financial savings for the council are regularly adopted. Far less common is evidence for multi-stakeholder, financially intensive actions that require specialist expertise to deliver over multiple years of progress towards a longer-term goal (e.g. air quality improvement or climate bonds).

This is reflective of the maturity among councils across the UK, who have in most cases focused resources and attention on developing tailored CAPs whilst delivering quick-win projects and improvements. Deeper, more ambitious climate action is much rarer and has so far been limited to disparate case studies and pilots. Whilst many councils have net zero targets between 2030 and 2050 (some even within the next five years), achieving progress towards emissions reduction at scale will require much more support from central government, such as better access to finance and planning policy improvements.

5. Governance & finance, Questions 11a, 11b.
6. Collaboration & Engagement, Question 11.
7. Governance & Finance, Question 10b.
8. Biodiversity, Question 9.
9. Transport, Questions 12a, 12b.

# Chapter 2: Council Governance



**This chapter contains a series of commentaries on trends and results from the Scorecards which relate to council governance processes. In each section, a characteristic has been used to split the data into two subsets – those councils who are aligned to the characteristic and those who are not. The characteristics are as follows:**

| Characteristic | Reason for inclusion | Impact on Score | Rank among all characteristics |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A. Climate portfolio holder** | An indicator for the degree of political interest and leadership in climate change within a council. | **11% increase** in overall score | **1st** |
| **B. Published climate strategies** | An indicator for how organised and comprehensive climate actions are. | **9% increase** in overall score | **3rd** |
| **C. Embedding area-wide carbon targets** | An indicator for council urgency on climate action. | **9% increase** in overall score | **4th** |
| **D. Emissions reporting** | An indicator for council transparency and public communication of progress. | **8% increase** in overall score | **5th** |
| **E. Use of risk register for climate action** | An indicator for how climate change is prioritized relative to other core council services. | **6% increase** in overall score | **7th** |
| **F. Staff resourcing on climate** | An indicator for understanding emission sources and the knowledge to make informed reduction decisions. | **5% increase** in overall score | **8th** |
| **G. Climate awareness training for council staff** | An indicator for understanding emission sources and the knowledge to make informed reduction decisions. | **2% increase** in overall score | **10th** |

Each section explores a characteristic and examines how it positively or negatively impacts a council's score across different sections and questions within the Scorecards. The last column in the table above shows where each characteristic ranks against all the other characteristics.

# **Characteristic A:** Climate portfolio holder

Councils will often appoint an elected member as a climate portfolio holder[10] on issues relating to climate change. It is the climate portfolio holder's responsibility to provide political leadership and scrutiny to the council's climate emergency response, reporting progress to cabinet and shaping different priority areas for climate action. Having a climate portfolio holder[10] on climate is widely established as a key governance arrangement which integrates climate into council decision-making.

The vast majority of councils (84%) have a climate portfolio holder. The Council Climate Action Scorecards define a climate portfolio holder as any of the following roles: Chair of Environment Committee, Cabinet Member for Environment, Chair of Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee or any title containing the words Climate Change, Climate Action, Climate Emergency, Environmental Sustainability, Environment, or similar. Having a climate portfolio holder ranked 1st in terms of its increase in scores. 60 responding councils do not have a dedicated climate portfolio holder on climate change or sustainability. These councils overall scored 11 percentage points lower across their scores compared to those that do have a climate portfolio holder.

**Councils with a climate portfolio holder consistently outscored those without, particularly across the Governance & Finance section.** There is a link between councils with climate portfolio holders and the extent to which the council improves its funding sourcing options; climate portfolio holder councils are much more likely to raise income through property development mechanisms, joint ventures, energy service companies and successful grant applications.

**Another positive link can be drawn between councils with climate portfolio holders and their ability to build partnerships with a variety of external stakeholders, including private businesses, cultural institutions, the health sector, young people and other local partnerships**.

Councils with climate portfolio holders scored well on these questions, in some cases scoring twice as well compared to councils without.

Other well-answered questions within the climate portfolio holder group include steps around implementation of circular economy, regulations for new energy efficient buildings and the transition of council fleet to EV.

Councils without climate portfolio holders for climate are at a significant disadvantage compared to those that do, only outperforming climate portfolio holder-councils in very limited instances across the Scorecard on topics such as implementing 20mph speed limit zones and flood plain planning regulations. These actions relate closely to other (non climate-related) council priorities i.e., pedestrian safety and safeguarding residential areas and are likely fall under the remit of multiple workstreams across the council. These questions are more poorly answered by councils with a climate portfolio holder, suggesting that there remain opportunities to integrate climate considerations into other council priorities and efforts.

**Among all characteristics assessed in this analysis, having a climate portfolio holder ranked first in terms of the improvement it gave to a council's average score.** The results suggest that demonstrating continued political support for climate action through a climate portfolio holder represents one of the single most effective actions a council can take, particularly when it comes to partnership building. For existing climate portfolio holders, the results also suggest that there is still some potential to improve integration of climate and non-climate council objectives by understanding overlaps in priorities (such as those in planning and transport) more fully.

10. Analysis for climate portfolio holder uses Governance & Finance, Question 7. Criteria for this question is met if the council has a role such as Chair of Environment Committee, Cabinet Member for Environment, Chair of Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee or any title with the words Climate Change, Climate Action, Climate Emergency, Environmental Sustainability, Environment or similar in it. This role can be merged with another role, such as Environment and Transport.

**84%**

**of councils have a climate portfolio holder.**

**1st**

**Having a climate portfolio holder ranked 1st in terms of its increase in scores.**

**60**

**responding councils do not have a dedicated climate portfolio holder on climate change or sustainability.**

**11%**

**These councils overall scored 11 percentage points lower across their scores compared to those that do have a climate portfolio holder.**

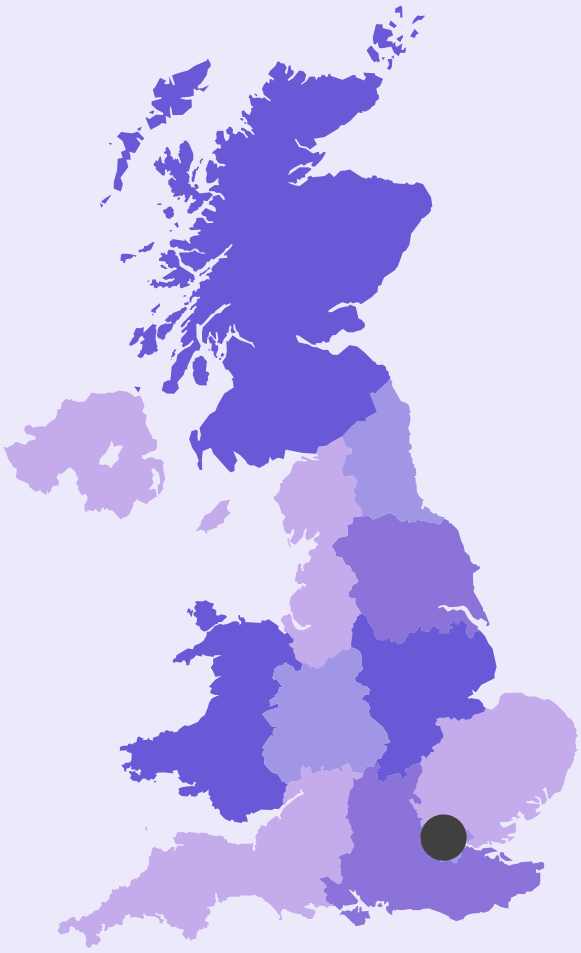
**Characteristic A**

# Case study:

## Hackney Council

Hackney scored well above average on the Council Climate Action Scorecards (52%) and is also home to the UK's largest low traffic neighbourhood (LTN) and school streets schemes, with 70% of the borough's residential side streets now covered by an LTN. LTNs are a good demonstration of a climate-positive project that requires strong political leadership which meets multiple council priorities, reducing emissions whilst safeguarding public health by improving active travel provision and air quality.

Implementation of LTNs has garnered significant political attention, with national government calling for a review amid concerns they may lead to congestion in neighbouring areas, despite **third party research** demonstrating net positive outcomes. Formalising the council's climate action within the responsibility of a dedicated portfolio for Climate Change, Environment & Transport provided the platform for political leadership that can support the development of significant climate actions.



**70%**

**of the borough's residential side streets now covered by an LTN.**

**52%**

**Hackney scored well above average on the Council Climate Action Scorecards (52%).**

# **Characteristic B:** Published climate strategies

The direction and priorities of a council are defined within internal documents which are drafted by officers and approved by council members. The documents are usually then published to an external audience whilst being used to guide internal decision making. The published strategies[11] assessed under this characteristic include CAPs and associated plans made publicly available by councils. The Council Climate Action Scorecards award a mark to councils which have a published CAP since 2015 that covers the council area and includes references to SMART targets[12].

CAPs detail actions for reducing carbon emissions and improving local areas across multiple sectors. It is best practice for CAPs to be published and readily available on a council's website so that they can be accessed by public and external stakeholders. Within a CAP, SMART targets can guide progress and provide measurable datapoints to monitor a council's progress. SMART targets are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. Using this approach for climate targets can improve accountability and transparency whilst allowing for better monitoring and feedback on progress.

**Having a published CAP had a small impact on a council's overall score, boosting scores by nine percentage points. Having a CAP with SMART targets similarly impacted on the council's overall score by nine percentage points. Having a CAP ranked 3rd in terms of its increase in scores.**

A council enacting climate action is, at its core, making a conscious effort to decide how it operates and governs in a more considerate manner, to reduce its carbon emissions and align with sustainability principles. Such a change in its operations and governance requires performance and change management to deliver the shift in strategy. **C40 Cities** stresses that the development of a CAP enables a council to *"organise its approach and... [to ensure] that investments in infrastructure and services do not lock in a high-carbon future"*.

Districts and single authorities both had a small increase in scores by having a published CAP. Having an up-to-date CAP tended to have an overall positive impact across all sectors, with particularly better performance in the Collaboration & Engagement section. This may be partially explained due to CAPs being intertwined with stakeholder engagement processes, and potentially due to the tangible and measurable targets helping envision what needs to be achieved. C40 Cities advises that "objectives for engagement should be aligned with the wider vision for the CAP", with an "inclusive, equitable and strategic engagement strategy" able to contribute to the delivery of a successful CAP.

Councils with a published CAP are far more likely to have a dedicated member of staff employed to work on retrofitting and notably more likely to have low emissions buses operating within the area. Councils with CAPs including SMART targets are also notably more likely to have committed to building all future council owned or managed housing to a high energy efficiency or operationally net zero standard when compared to councils with no CAP and are more likely than those with a CAP which does not feature SMART targets. Additionally, councils with a published CAP are far more likely to have taken steps to support a local circular economy than those without. This may demonstrate the council's wider approach to sustainability.

11. Analysis for published strategies uses Collaboration & Engagement, Questions 2a and 2b.
12. Points were awarded if the following criteria was met:
- The council has published an annual report since 1st January 2022.
- The annual report is easy-to-read.
- The annual report includes reporting on progress towards the council's climate action plan SMART targets.

# +9%

**Having a published CAP had a small impact on a council's overall score, boosting scores by nine percentage points.**

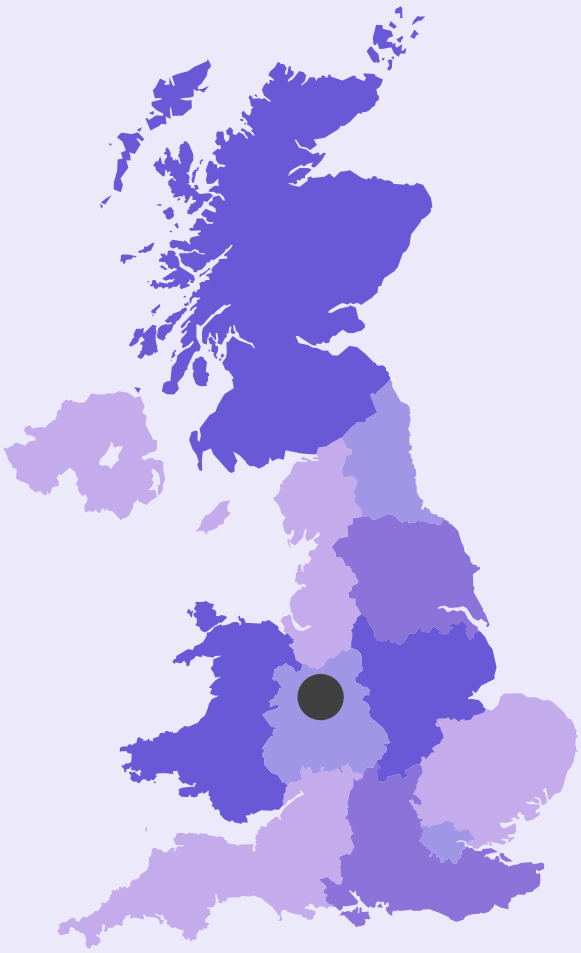
# 3rd

**Having a CAP ranked 3rd in terms of its increase in scores.**

**Characteristic B**

# Case study:

## Bury Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC)



BMBC scored 41% overall on the Action Scorecards, five percentage points higher than the average single-tier authority and falling within the top quarter of all local authorities. The council scored 70% in Planning & Land Use and 60% in Collaboration & Engagement and scored full marks in the two analysis questions used within this section. The council also scored full marks on the questions highlighted above covering housing and retrofitting, low emissions buses, and circular economies.

The council has committed to moving towards low carbon housing and to align its work with the 2038 carbon neutrality target for Greater Manchester. BMBC's key strategies and climate documents are available on the council's **website**. The principles within the council's CAP are integrated across the different sector strategies, such as its **Housing Strategy** and its **Corporate Plan**, which has carbon neutral local neighbourhoods as a key principle, covering eco-housing, public sector emissions, recycling and clean air plan, and green and blue infrastructure.

# 70%

**The council scored 70% in Planning & Land Use.**

# 60%

**The council scored 60% in Collaboration & Engagement.**

# 41%

**BMBC scored 41% overall on the Council Climate Action Scorecards.**

# Characteristic C:
# Embedding area-wide carbon targets

The majority of UK local authorities (nearly two thirds as of 2023) have set a target to reduce their area-wide carbon emissions to some degree by 2030, with some committing to becoming net zero or carbon neutral by 2030. Local authorities have either set a net zero target or a carbon neutrality target. A net zero target requires councils to reduce all of their greenhouse emissions to as close to zero as possible before offsetting their residual emissions. Carbon neutrality targets also require councils to reduce their emissions to zero but focus solely on carbon emissions and permits the use of offsets at any time.

This section assesses the impact of councils having a net zero target and going beyond national policy to identify the climate emergency as a main priority within strategies. This can be demonstrated by including the target within key governance processes. The Council Climate Action Scorecards awarded a mark to councils which included climate action with a net zero target (alternatively called Sustainability or Environment) as one of the council's core priorities or equivalent[15]. Additionally, the council's net zero target date must be an area-wide target, either the UK Government's national target, the devolved nation's target or the council's area-wide net zero target.

Overall, only 20 councils scored full marks across the three questions used to assess this characteristic across their corporate plans, financial plans, or Local Plans[16], with most councils (81%) having a net zero target included within at least one of the plans. The inclusion of a net zero target into at least one of the council's governance processes led to a small increase of nine percentage points in overall total scores across all councils and ranked 4th in terms of its increase in scores.

**The presence of a net zero target within a council's governance or local plan had an overall positive correlation with higher scores across the different sectors. Including a net zero target as a strategic objective in a local plan had a positive impact of between four to six percentage points on a council's performance within Planning & Land Use across all councils[17]**. This may be due to local plans with net zero targets potentially being more likely to the role of planning within climate action and actively try to address the climate emergency. Published advice from locally focused thinktank **Localis** advises local authorities to be *"streamlined and cross-cutting in a manner which can only be achieved by the wider scope of local plans, rather than relying on siloed strategies for net zero or the environment alone"* to properly address the climate emergency. Additionally, local plans can increase local climate resilience and allow councils to go beyond the National Planning Policy Framework to reduce emissions. Across other sectors, county councils with a net zero target included within their corporate plan scored notably higher. Transport saw the second-largest increase in scores if a council included a net zero target within its corporate plan.

**Northern Irish local authorities saw the lowest overall benefit of the inclusion of a net zero target as a strategic objective and saw a minor decrease in scores if a net zero target was included within a corporate plan.** Northern Ireland was the last devolved administration to set their current national net zero target for 2050 when it introduced The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) in 2022. In comparison, Scotland introduced their current net zero targets in 2019, and Wales set its net zero target in 2021. Additionally, Scottish public bodies have been required to report their emissions **since 2011** and all 32 Scottish local authorities signed Scotland's Climate Change Declaration in 2007. This may contribute to the negative impact of scoring with this characteristic if local action is not matched by nation-wide policies and approaches in sectors requiring legislative changes and significant capital costs. Wales and Northern Ireland saw negative deviations for certain sectors and in their overall scores, particularly for Buildings & Heating, and Planning & Land Use, which may further demonstrate the importance of national context and influence.

15. According to the criteria, it must have its own heading or section and a net zero target date must be referenced.
16. Analysis for ambitious area-wide carbon targets uses Governance & Finance, Question 1a, Governance & Finance, Question 1b and Planning & Land Use, Question 1.
17. This does not include county councils, who mostly do not have local plans as they are often not planning authorities.

**The questions which saw the biggest increase in scores relate to high-impact action areas. These include employing dedicated staff members to work on retrofitting, implementing charges for private vehicles in Clean Air/Low Emissions Zones and having a minimum requirement for on -site renewable energy generation for a new building development.** Few councils who included a net zero target as a strategic objective also scored highly in all of these high-impact action areas, which may be explained by the significant work needed to implement each action.

# 81%

**of councils have a net zero target included within at least one of the plans.**

# 4th

**The presence of a net zero target within a council's governance/local plan ranked 4th in terms of its increase in scores.**

**Characteristic C**

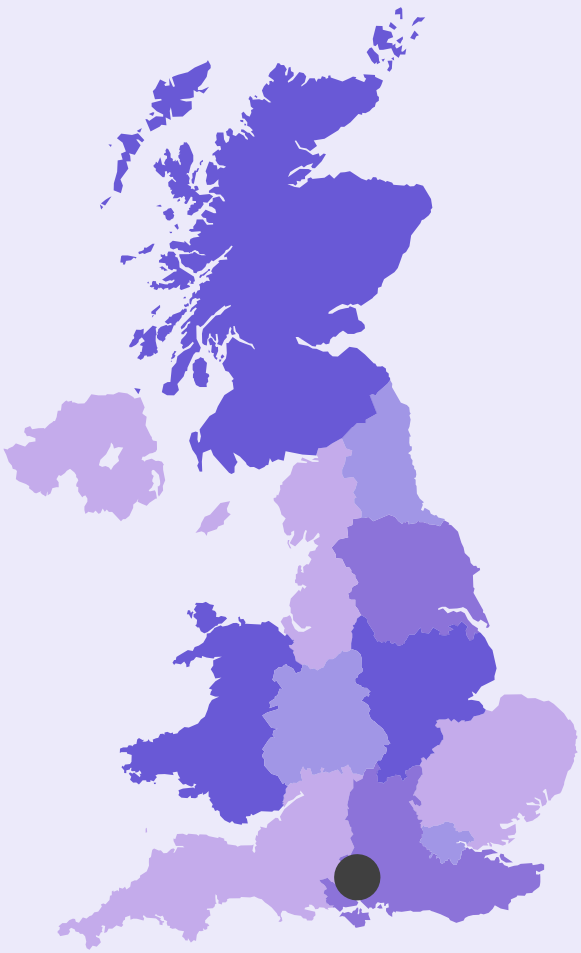
# Case study:

## Winchester City Council

Winchester City Council is one of the highest scoring district councils (49%) and scored higher than average in all sectors (ranging from 3% – 49%) excluding the Waste Reduction & Food sector. The council has embedded its net zero target across its corporate plan, financial plan and within its local plan. The council subsequently scored positively in these areas and showed strong positive correlation with the analysis questions discussed above.

Winchester City Council's Corporate Plan features a range of positive climate actions across the different sectors. In particular, the Council Plan aims to reduce energy demand and increase local renewable energy generation. The Council has secured funding for and promoted the **Warmer Homes programme** as well as starting the council homes retrofit programme (**Retrofit Ready**). Regarding increasing renewable energy generation, over **2,500 solar panels** have been installed throughout the district and the Solar Together Hampshire scheme has been set up for residents to buy solar panels and battery storage at a competitive price.

Winchester City Council's **Local Plan** supports the council with its 2030 net zero target by including topics like carbon neutrality and low carbon infrastructure, high quality well designed places and living, and sustainable transport and active travel. This shows the potential for net zero targets to be integrated across wider council operations and target its highest emitting sectors, such as buildings, and increase renewable capacity.



# 49%

**Winchester City Council is one of the highest scoring district councils (49%).**

# **Characteristic D:** Emissions reporting

82% of councils have a CAP which aims to track, measure, and reduce emissions within their administrative boundary. Publicly and transparently publishing emissions[13] is a means of increasing accountability for taking meaningful climate action as well as providing a data-led evidence base for defining ongoing reduction projects. Councils who report their emissions have a better **grasp of emission intense activities**, which they can look to reduce. This characteristic looks at councils who report their own organisational greenhouse gas emissions. It does not include their borough wide emissions.

The Council Climate Action Scorecards awards marks to a council which is reporting its own emissions (covering Scopes 1, 2, and 3), uses best practice guidance[14], covers a continuous 12-month period, and includes data from 2019 and 2021 (or the financial year 2021/22).

Across all the characteristics analysed, **reporting on greenhouse gas emissions ranked 5th in terms of its increase in scores**. Approximately a third (129) of councils report their own organisational greenhouse gas emissions, whereas two thirds of councils do not. **Councils with this characteristic scored approximately 8 percentage points higher across the whole Scorecard than councils who do not report their emissions.** More specifically, counties which report their emissions benefited from reporting emissions as they typically scored 12 percentage points higher across the Scorecard than district and single-tier authorities.

**Councils reporting their greenhouse gas emissions scored better than councils who do not report their emissions across all seven sections on the Scorecard. The Governance & Finance section showed the biggest increase in scores amongst councils who do report their emissions.** There is a notable increase in the likelihood between councils reporting their emissions and putting climate at the centre of decision making, embedding net zero and climate action within internal plans and policies. **Another notable increase can be seen with emissions reporting and holding and managing a climate change risk register, alongside raising funds for climate action through sources like loans, grants, and joint ventures.**

In the Transport section of the Scorecards, councils who report their greenhouse gas emissions are also more likely to transition their vehicle fleet to electric, support the installation of electric charge points across the public network, and implement 20mph speed limits for most restricted roads.

Other question topics which were well answered by councils who report emissions included: providing funding for community climate action, publishing an up-to-date annual report of their CAP, and supporting the circular economy and food reduction through strategies and partnerships. Additionally, questions on reducing single use plastics in buildings, events and for external events occurring on council owned land, property or public spaces, were twice as likely to be answered better than councils who do not report their emissions.

Councils who report their emissions scored better on questions which tended to relate to actions which are easier to achieve, due to less resources required (e.g. reducing single use plastics). Also, the questions range across 4 sections of the Scorecard, which could be due to councils which identify their own emission hotspots consequently knowing where to direct action. For example, embedding net zero in plans and policies will help target action in specific high-emitting areas and switching to electric vehicles will reduce fleet emissions. Councils who do not report their own greenhouse gas emissions scored higher on questions relating to the embedding net zero in their local plan. These councils also scored well on supporting home retrofits, which was well answered by more than 80% of councils.

13. Analysis for emissions reporting uses Governance & Finance, Question 3a
14. Criteria is met if the council is reporting its own emissions and fulfil all of the following: the council states whether they are using the Environmental Reporting Guidelines from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the GCoM Common Reporting Framework (CRF), the Greenhouse Gas Accounting Tool (from the LGA), the Greenhouse Gas Protocol for Cities (Community Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventories) or for Corporate Standards to develop their inventory. Councils must state whether they are using either:
- the inventory must cover a continuous period of 12 months, either a calendar year or a financial year.
- there must be data from 2019 and 2021 (or the financial year 2021/22).
- the council must be measuring their own Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.

**Reporting emissions represents an effective way to increase accountability and incentivise climate action through placing it at the core of plans and policies which can cause positive impact across the sectors.** Councils reporting on emissions lead to a boost in scores across all sectors through improved performance in governance processes, but also by tackling high-emitting areas, such as switching the council's fleet to EVs. Councils which already report their greenhouse gas emissions may look to focus on the natural environment, especially green spaces and implement clean air zones to further progress vehicle reduction and decarbonisation. Further, the improved visibility of council performance through emissions data – and climate reporting more generally – would make research like the Scorecards more efficient and allow for more detailed insights to be developed.

**1/3**

**Approximately 1/3 of councils report their organisational emissions.**

**5th**

**Reporting on greenhouse gas emissions ranked 5th in terms of its increase in scores.**

**Characteristic D**

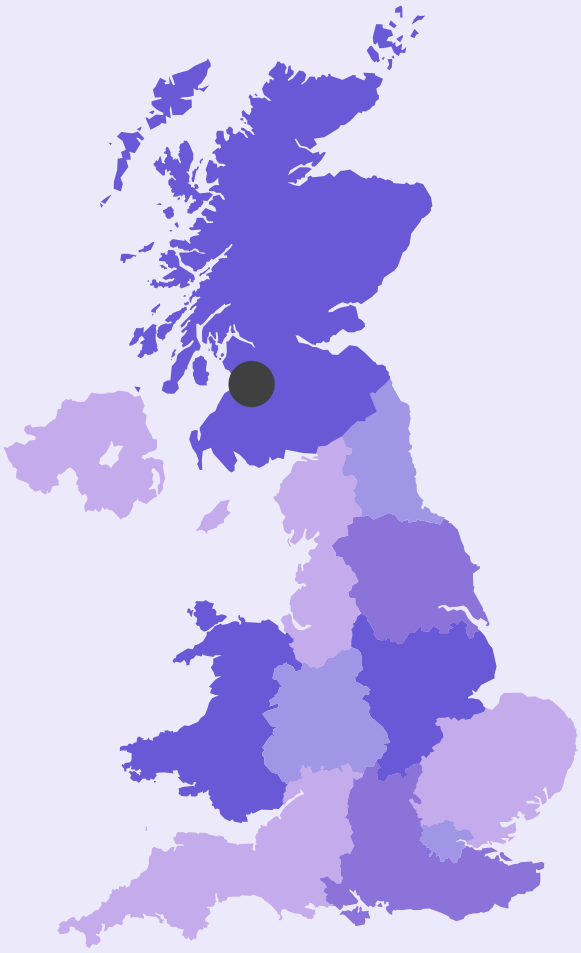
# Case study:

## Renfrewshire Council

Scottish councils overall were positively impacted by reporting emissions (18 percentage points across all the sections), compared to the other 3 nations which ranged from 4 to 8 percentage points. Renfrewshire Council scored 46% on their Council Climate Action Scorecard, higher than the average Scottish authority (34%). The council scored 19% and 25% above the average score in the Government and Finance and Transport section respectively.

Renfrewshire Council has been reporting on their emissions since 2014-2015, due to a **statutory requirement** in Scotland where annual reports must detail progress on mitigation and adaptation regarding climate change. Between 2014/2015 and 2021/2022, Renfrewshire has reduced its total **carbon equivalent emissions** by just under half.

Renfrewshire Council has taken action within their own governance by embedding net zero into their **Council Plan 2022-2027** and co-created a **risk register** with other councils in the Glasgow City Region as well as attaining **funding from ECO4 Flex** to make homes more energy efficient. Action has also occurred in the transport sector, where **30% of the vehicle fleet is electric** and has made **20mph** the speed limit for most restricted roads. Additionally, in 2022 the Scottish government has **banned the most problematic single use plastics**, and therefore has aided Scottish councils, including Renfrewshire, to reduce their waste impact.



**46%**

**Renfrewshire Council scored 46% on their Council Climate Action Scorecard.**

# Characteristic E:
# Use of risk register for climate action

A risk register contains recognised risks, the likelihood of their occurrence, and the impacts they may cause. Councils use risk registers to document a variety of identified potential hazards, assess them, and identify actions to mitigate and reduce negative impacts. Integrating climate risks into council registers means that subsequent mitigation and adaptation actions must be defined, potentially enabling councils with a climate risk register to better adapt to the changing climate and the ensuing risks than those that do not. The risks are ranked overall to provide an understanding of the high-risk areas which should be prioritised first. This section focuses on councils with a risk register that includes climate change, which specifically identifies climate hazards which may impact council services and local authorities.

Councils were awarded a mark within the Council Climate Action Scorecards if they accurately identified the environmental risks of climate change to the local area, either in a stand-alone climate change or adaptation risk register, or incorporated into the council's corporate risk register[18]. A third of councils (114) across the UK have a climate change risk register, or climate risks are sufficiently integrated into wider risk registers. **Across all the characteristics that have been analysed in this report, managing a climate change risk register ranked 7th in terms of raising a council's average score. Councils with a risk register scored on average six percentage points higher than those without.** Single-tier and district authorities were positively impacted from having a climate change risk register as they typically scored around 5.5 percentage points more than councils who do not. Councils in Northern Ireland who have a risk register scored 11 percentage points higher across all questions than councils who do not.

**Councils with a risk register which includes climate change scored better on all sections than councils without. In particular, the Governance & Finance questions were answered better by councils who have a risk register.** The question topics included embedding net zero and climate action into their corporate plan, mid-term financial plan and procurement policies, and additionally, raising income from property development and other sources (e.g., grants, loans, and joint ventures). Moreover, these councils were twice as likely to have their senior management and councillors (in the cabinet or committee chairs) trained on climate, which is expected to help with embedding climate action into the plans and policies.

Additionally, councils who maintain a risk register that includes climate change showed a notable relationship with supporting with the EV transition through switching their vehicle fleet to electric, enabling the expansion of public network electric charge points and committing to 20mph speed limit zones. Councils with a risk register may be more likely to support vehicle decarbonisation and reducing speed limits due to the identification of air pollution within the risk register.

Councils who have a risk register identifying climatic hazards are more likely to influence government for climate action as they will have transparency on risks affecting them and the limited action they can take. Influencing government will help bridge any gaps where councils will need support to reduce the overall impacts from climate hazards.

Across the Scorecards, councils who do not manage climate hazards are more likely to score poorly than those council which do. However, councils who do not have a risk register scored better on the number of parks awarded Green Flag status, and the number of the council's overall staff working on implementing their CAP and other climate change projects.

**Maintaining a climate risk register, or including climate risks within the council's risk register, is a strong indicator that the council performs relatively well in the delivery of climate action. Councils with risk registers are much more likely to also have strong governance arrangements.**

18. Analysis for climate risk register uses Governance & Finance, Question 2. Criteria for this question states that there must be an explicit link between climate change and the increased risk of flooding or other weather events. Adaptation plans are not valid, unless there is a risk register or equivalent within the adaptation plan.

There is also evidence to suggest this translates into a higher degree of officer and elected member education. Identifying climate risks which will impact areas across the city also helps councils to understand where opportunities exist for climate action. From this understanding, overall objectives and actions can start to form and be **prioritised**, which can be **integrated into plans, policies and decision making to reduce emissions and act on climate**.

# 1/3

**of councils (114) across the UK have a climate change risk register.**

# 7th

**Managing a climate change risk register ranked 7th in terms of raising a council's average score.**

**Characteristic E**

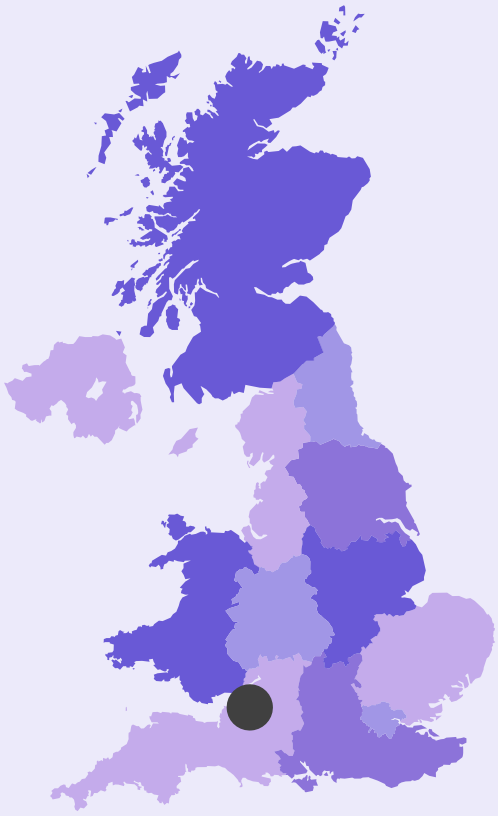
## Case study:

### Bristol City Council

Bristol City Council overall scored 55% (compared to the average for single tier authorities is 36%) on their Climate Action Scorecard, placing them in 12th place for single-tier authorities. Across Bristol's Scorecard, the only sections where Bristol scored below average was the Planning & Land Use sector, with the council scoring between 4% to 45% above the average score in other sections.

Bristol City Council published their '**Preliminary Climate Resilience Assessment**' in 2020, which identifies Bristol's physical, social and businesses and economy assets which are exposed to climate hazards (e.g. transport, education and supply chains). Alongside their climate risk register, Bristol Council has embedded progression to net zero within their **Procurement Policy** by using suppliers who promote equality and use sustainable resources. The **Corporate Strategy 2022-27** lays out a theme on the environment and sustainability, which is also implemented into their **Financial Plan 2022-23**. Additionally, there is a page on the council's website dedicated to **climate action** on a range of different topics including transport, public services, and the natural environment. This collection of documentation indicates strong governance arrangements and council management processes that embed climate.

The council raises income through property development like the community infrastructure levy (CIL) which is then used to fund improvements across the city. One such improvement that has been funded is **flood remediation work**, which may have been identified in the climate risk register through the modelled flood maps across Bristol. The council has also been able to secure a share of funding from **Innovate UK** to develop innovative ways to overcome net zero challenges.



# 55%

**Bristol City Council scored 55% overall on the Council Climate Action Scorecards.**

# Characteristic F:
# Staff resourcing on climate

In the context of the Council Climate Action Scorecards, staff resourcing refers to the number of officers working to deliver the council's climate objectives, marked as a percentage of all staff[19]. This could either be whole teams or individuals. Most councils have dedicated sustainability/climate teams; however, some have one or two key officers with the rest of the responsibility shared with officers across the entire council.

Only three councils scored full marks on this question by having over 2% of council staff working on implementing their CAP. The number of staff employed by a council varies dramatically, with some large councils having staff exceeding 7,000 whilst others are below 500. Just over half (53%) of qualifying councils have multiple staff members (equating to 0.5% of total council staff) employed 3 days a week or more to be working on the council's CAP or other climate change projects. A council having a small proportion of its staffing (0.5% or more) working on the council's CAP or climate projects made a small difference to scores, correlating with scores five percentage points higher than those who didn't. **Staff resourcing had an overall positive correlation with higher scoring councils.**

**Among all characteristics assessed in this analysis, having higher staff resourcing on the council's CAP ranked 8th in terms of the boost it gave to a council's average score.** The **Local Government Association** states that "Local government needs a suitably skilled, well-motivated and engaged workforce that… can continue its work through challenging times". Local authorities have experienced severe budget cuts since 2010, with spending power in 2021/22 still **10% lower** than in 2010. Budget cuts were mainly in grant funding from central government, which **reduced by 40%** between 2009/10 and 2021/22. This is demonstrated within the scores with the overall positive improvement in scores seen in councils with at least 0.5% of their officers working on the council's CAP.

**Single-tier authorities and county councils benefitted the most from having more staff working on their CAP, scoring higher across all sectors. County councils with more staff working on their CAP scored five percentage points higher in Buildings & Heating than those who didn't.** Given the significant work required to be planned and implemented to score within Buildings & Heating, adequate staff resourcing can aid progress by increasing capacity of a council's overall workforce and enabling greater action to be taken on high-emitting sectors, such as buildings.
Single-tier authorities with at least 0.5% of their staff working on their CAP scored significantly higher across five out of the seven sectors and scored particularly higher in the Governance & Finance section. Councils with higher staff resourcing were notably more likely to have a collective buying renewable energy scheme for residents and far more likely to have approved planning applications for new or expanded solar or wind developments, battery storage, or renewable district heat networks.

Councils with lower staff resourcing on their CAP, however, showed better scoring on questions relating to partnerships (for example with health services) on climate action policies and sustainable food partnerships. Councils may focus more on external partnerships directly as a result of a lack of available internal funding and staff to work on climate policies. Existing networks, relationships and non-specialist resources may not require additional employee time. This approach, therefore, may allow councils to work on the implementation of their CAPs despite their restricted staff resourcing, through leveraging partnerships and existing networks. As council funding becomes further constrained, this approach may be increasingly important and should be considered by local authorities.

19. Analysis for staff resourcing on climate uses Governance & Finance, Question 8.

# 53%

**Just over half (53%) of qualifying councils have multiple staff members (equating to 0.5% of total council staff) employed 3 days a week or more to be working on the council's CAP or other climate change projects.**

# 8th

**Higher staff resourcing on the council's CAP ranked 8th in terms of the boost it gave to a council's average score.**

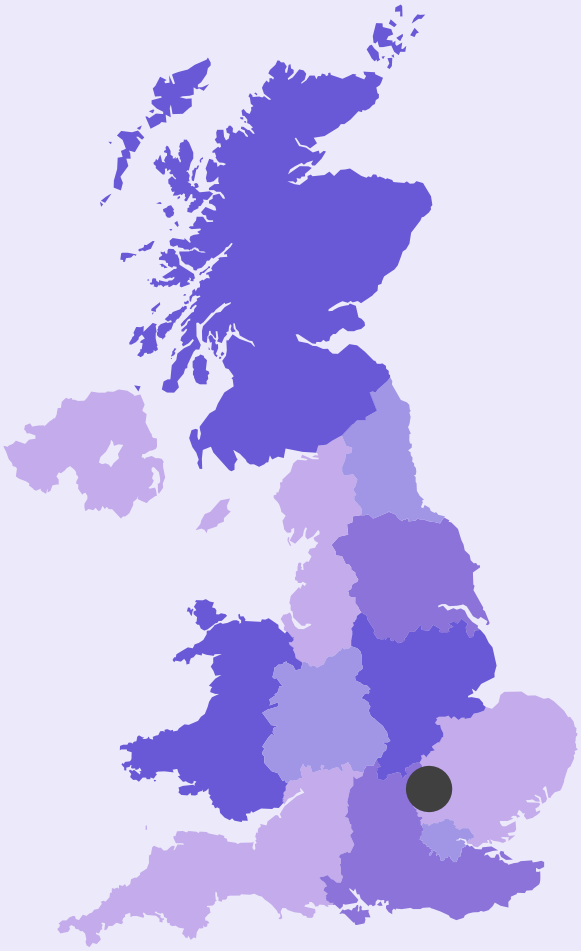
**Characteristic F**

# Case study:

## Central Bedfordshire Council

Central Bedfordshire Council scored 38% overall on their Climate Action Scorecard and scored 48% in Governance & Finance, 21 percentage points higher than the average single-tier authority. Central Bedfordshire Council has between 1-2% of its staff working on the implementation of its CAP. The first action within Bedfordshire Council's Sustainability Plan 2020-2030 is to enhance capacity within council processes to deliver sustainable actions, through training and appointing additional sustainability posts.

The areas where Central Bedfordshire Council and other councils with higher levels of staffing perform better both fall outside of a council's core services and are, in other words, actions requiring additional resources. For example, the council has a Solar Together scheme for the local area and has planning guidance for solar and wind power projects across the local area, both key areas which saw the biggest increase in scores across all local authorities with higher staff resourcing. Additionally, Central Bedfordshire Council was one of the seven single-tier authorities that scored full marks for their enforcement of Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) of homes in the private rented sector. Central Bedfordshire Council's approach to enhancing the capacity of its staff to implement sustainability may, therefore, enable the council to adopt schemes outside of its core remit and allow for wider climate action to be undertaken.



# 1-2%

**of its staff working on the implementation of its CAP.**

# 38%

**Central Bedfordshire Council scored 38% overall on their Council Climate Action Scorecard.**

# **Characteristic G:** Climate awareness training for council staff and Councillors

Climate awareness training provides awareness and understanding of climate impacts from everyday activities and how to reduce emissions on an individual, community or organisational level. Councils are implementing this training for their staff and councillors with the goal of enabling staff to be more conscious of carbon emissions and to, therefore, make more **informed decisions** on actions relating to the climate.

Councils were awarded a mark in the Council Climate Action Scorecards if all senior management and councillors in leadership positions such as cabinet members or committee chairs elected before May 2023 have received climate awareness training (Carbon Literacy® or equivalent training)[20]. A small proportion of councils, 51 out of 377, have provided all senior management and councillors (cabinet members and/or committee chairs) with climate awareness training. The remaining 326 councils were likely to score fewer points overall than councils who provided training. **Across all the characteristics analysed, providing climate awareness training ranked 10th in relation to the increase it gave to all council's average score. More specifically, single-tier councils on average scored seven percentage points higher across all the questions in comparison to councils who did not provide climate awareness training.**

**Across all sections in the Scorecards, authorities which had provided their senior management and councillors with climate awareness training presented a slightly higher score than authorities who do not**. The Biodiversity questions were answered better (on average improving scores by five percentage points in this section) by authorities who provided climate awareness training for their senior management and councillors than those that don't. There is a small relationship between climate awareness training and looking for opportunities to increase and maximise biodiversity net gain and improving green spaces through increasing tree cover, good management and maintenance and creating safer and healthy places for people.

A second notable link can be seen between councils providing climate awareness training and the implementation of clean air or low-emission zones. These zones are likely to charge private vehicles, have better air quality and promote the switching of the council vehicle fleet to electric. Councils providing training scored 1.5 times more on these questions than councils who do not provide training. Councils providing climate awareness training scored well in topics relating to introducing the circular economy locally, publishing a climate change risk register and increasing staff resourcing.

Providing climate awareness training increases members' understanding of where direct and impactful carbon reduction activities can occur. Implementing clean air zones will directly reduce emissions due to reducing polluting vehicles on the roads and idling from traffic. Additionally, increasing the quality of green spaces increases carbon reduction through carbon sequestration. Councils who do not provide training are more likely to focus on indirect carbon savings e.g. reducing single use plastics, which may be easier to implement but ultimately are less impactful. **Climate awareness training appears to, therefore, enable councils to tackle more direct sources of carbon emissions which may involve inter-departmental agreement and coordination but also require large-scale changes outside of the council, such as low emissions zones.**

20. Analysis for climate awareness training uses Governance & Finance, Question 9.

# 14%

**(51 out of 377), have provided all senior management and councillors (cabinet members and/or committee chairs) with climate awareness training.**

# 10th

**Providing climate awareness training ranked 10th in relation to the increase it gave to all council's average score.**

**Characteristic G**

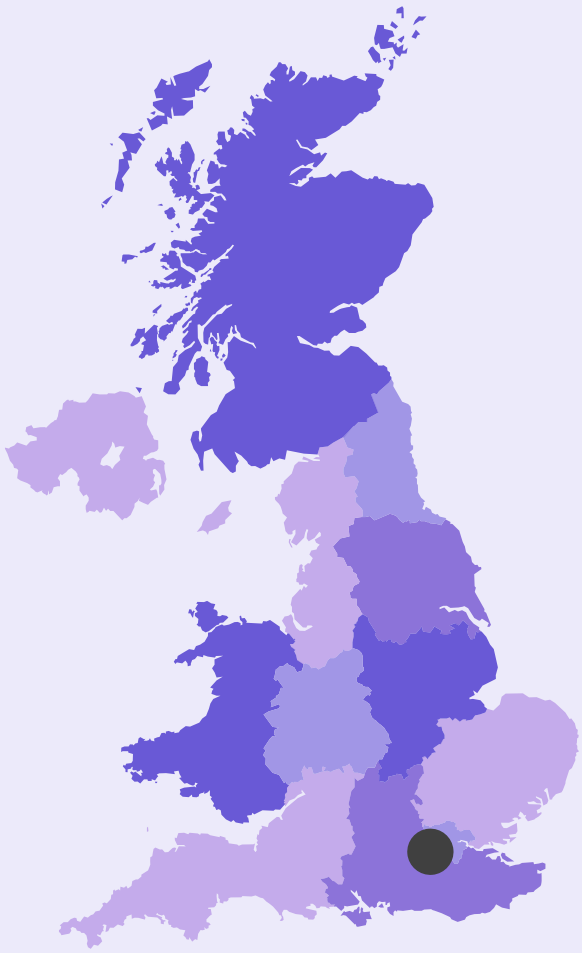
# Case study:

## Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames

Kingston upon Thames Council scored above average (49%) across their Action Scorecard, ranking 31st in single-tier authorities. In particular, the Biodiversity and Transport sections were higher than the average section score by 31% and 30% respectively. However, the Waste Reduction & Food section was lower than the average by 25%. These results reflect what was discovered in the analysis of the data, as councils rolling out climate awareness training were more likely to score better on Biodiversity and Transport and worse on Waste, which was scored better by councils who do not prioritise climate awareness training. All senior management at Kingston Upon Thames Council have **completed a Carbon Literacy course**. A few councillors in the cabinet or committee chairs were in the process of completing the course and there is a plan to train all members, but there is no delivery date yet.

**Carbon Literacy** teaches participants about how our activities create emissions, the subsequent impact of those emissions and what can be done to reduce those impacts. The training more broadly has been shown to be an **effective tool** for understanding environmental and financial savings. An example of where this knowledge may have been implemented is within the **Biodiversity Action Plan** published in 2023, where the fourth action focuses on biodiversity net gain targets for developments across the region. All senior management received carbon literacy training a year before this was published.

The **council states** that the training is useful to provide an 'understanding of what a council can be delivering to reduce its impact'. The training can provide action across multiple areas of the council



especially when the training has been targeted to staff working in the 'most relevant areas, such as Commissiong, Finance, Planning and Highways'. Projects including switching street lighting to LED bulbs (6,600 bulbs), increasing renewable energy generation and switching their council fleet to **electric vehicles** (approximately 27 electric vehicles).

# 49%

**Kingston upon Thames Council scored above average (49%) across their Council Climate Action Scorecard.**

# Chapter 3: Enabling Factors

**This chapter contains a series of commentaries on trends and results from the Scorecards which relate to wider enabling factors to a council's performance. In each section, a "characteristic" has been used to split the data into two subsets – those councils who are aligned to the characteristic and those who are not. The characteristics are as follows:**

| Characteristic | Reason for inclusion | Impact on Score | Rank among all characteristics |
|---|---|---|---|
| **H. Access to funding for climate action** | An indicator for the council's ability to access financing. | **9% increase** in overall score | **2nd** |
| **I. Engaging with the private sector** | An indicator for the interest and ability for the Council to access the private sector for potential collaboration. | **8% increase** in overall score | **6th** |
| **J. Contrasting rural and urban authorities** | An indicator to understand the impact resident density on how climate action is prioritised. | **4% increase** in overall score | **9th** |
| **K. Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) rating** | An indicator to explore how levels of deprivation impact climate action. | **1% increase** in overall score | **11th** |
| **L. Membership of a combined authority** | An indicator for understanding the benefits of being within a combined authority structure. | **-4% decrease** in overall score | **12th** |
| **M. Cross party representation** | An indicator to explore the impact of political party make up on council decision making. | **-5% decrease** in overall score | **13th** |

Each section explores a characteristic and examines how it positively or negatively impacts a council's score across different sections and questions within the Scorecard. The last column in the table above shows where each characteristic ranks against all the other characteristics.

# **Characteristic H:** Access to funding for climate action

Access to funding is crucial for local authorities to act on climate and reduce emissions. The UK Climate Change Committee's **Sixth Carbon Budget** states that: "Local authorities require sufficient funding, whether in their annual settlement or through ring-fenced funding, to increase their skills and capacity to deliver the project pipeline for Net Zero". Despite this demonstrable need, local authorities across the UK have faced significant funding constraints over the past two decades, with local authorities in England having lost 60p from every £1 of funding from central government since 2010. It is projected that local authority budgets will face a **£3 billion funding gap** over the next two years to provide their current services alone. Alternative funding mechanisms have been motivated by external financial pressures, as well as a need for novel financing structures that encourage the typical delivery of upfront costs for climate actions later offset by operational savings over time.

One mechanism available to local authorities is community municipal investment (CMIs), also known as local climate bonds. Councils were awarded a mark within the Council Climate Action Scorecards if they had launched a Climate Bond, Community Municipal Investment or equivalent of any amount to raise funds for climate action[21]. CMIs have been increasingly adopted by councils in recent years to provide non-repayable capital for local projects. There are numerous models of CMIs which may include some or no return for investors. It is estimated that there is approximately **£3.34 trillion of investable wealth** in the UK which could be drawn upon by local authorities through CMIs to achieve their climate goals.

**Approximately 3% of councils have launched a climate bond, community municipal investment or equivalent. Across all characteristics assessed in this analysis, launching a climate bond or equivalent ranked 2nd in relation to the positive impact it gave to a council's average score.**

The councils with climate bonds or equivalent scored notably higher than those without. Single-tier authorities' scores were improved by ten percentage points by this characteristic.

**Most sectors were also positively influenced by this characteristic, except for Planning & Land Use, Governance & Finance, and Biodiversity.** This may be partially explained by funding not directly enabling planning policy projects in the same way as for other sectors. Sustainable transport projects, for instance, require significant capital investment, alongside alternative approaches used by planning, such as Biodiversity Net Gain and Section 106 requirements. The Transport section was the most significantly impacted by the presence of this characteristic, with a three-percentage point increase on Transport scores, alongside Buildings & Heating. Climate action in these sectors often involves significant capital to build infrastructure, demonstrating the role schemes like climate bonds can play in infrastructure projects (though it is acknowledged that climate bonds specifically raise small amounts of money relative to the requirements for major infrastructure projects). It is worth noting that no council who had launched a climate bond or equivalent had scored positively in all these areas, indicating that climate bonds are often focused on specific projects.

Local authorities face various challenges in securing consistent substantive funding for climate action. The number of councils who have developed a climate bond scheme or similar is also relatively small. This may be due to the model's recent adoption by local authorities, meaning there is a potential gap in knowledge and expertise in councils to set up and manage a climate bond, or there is limited staff resource to do so. Five of the councils with a CMI are part of the **Green Finance Institute** Local Climate Bond scheme, a national Local Climate Bond campaign launched in 2021. The campaign worked with councils to share knowledge and offer support through the planning and launching stages of the bonds.

21. Analysis for access to finance use Governance & Finance, Question 10b.

The small percentage (3%) limits trend identification, however, for those councils who had set up a climate bond, they were exceptionally more likely to have supported community renewable energy (Q1.12) and to have taken steps to set up a local circular economy project. Additionally, they were far more likely than those without a climate bond to have incorporated a net zero target into their corporate plan (Q4.1a) and have raised income for climate action from property development.

# 2nd

**Launching a climate bond or equivalent ranked 2nd in relation to the positive impact it gave to a council's average score.**

**Characteristic H**

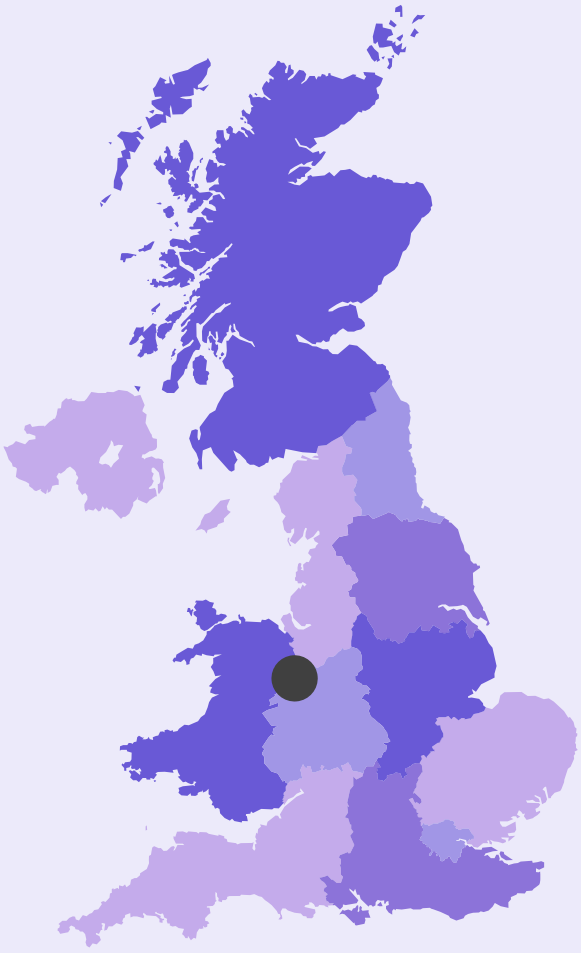
# Case study:

## Telford & Wrekin Council

Telford & Wrekin Council scored 45% on the Action Scorecards, 9% above the average for single tier authorities. This council also scored 18% higher than average in the Governance & Finance section and 23% higher than average in the Buildings & Heating section. The council is provided as a case study as it has implemented a municipal investment scheme, also known as a Local Climate Bond.

Telford & Wrekin Council, along with seven other councils (West Berkshire, Warrington Council, Cotswold District Council, Camden Council, Hammersmith & Fulham Council, Westminster City Council and Islington Council) are part of the Green Finance Institute and Abundance Investment's **Local Climate Bond campaign**. The municipal investment allows local authorities to raise capital to fund certain green projects in their area, e.g. building retrofit, wind farm and solar panel installations and rewilding using a regulated crowdfunding model. The local climate bonds are open to investment from residents with a minimum of £5, providing a low risk and fixed return investment.

In 2022, Telford & Wrekin launched the **investment scheme**, raising £339,000, which has been used to fund the retrofit of council-owned accommodation, vehicle fleet decarbonisation and the **Climate Change Fund**, which supports local organisations with grants to reduce their emissions. This approach demonstrates the potential opportunities for councils to use alternative funding models to fund climate action that reduce emissions.



# 23%

**Telford & Wrekin Council scored 23% higher than average in the Buildings & Heating section.**

# 45%

**Telford & Wrekin Council scored 45% in the Council Climate Action Scorecards.**

# **Characteristic I:** Engaging with the private sector

Authorities alone cannot reduce the total quantity of carbon emissions associated with activities in their boundary. Therefore, receiving support and collaborating with different stakeholders is crucial. Working in partnership with local businesses can ensure resources and best practice are shared, to increase emission reduction activities. Establishing a partnership with businesses can also lead to other benefits like sharing technology, innovation, finance and increasing scale of projects.

Across all characteristics assessed in this report, councils working in partnership with local businesses on decarbonisation ranked 6th in relation to the positive impact it gave to a council's average score[22]. Councils were awarded a mark in the Council Climate Action Scorecards if they provided support or free tailored advice to businesses in the local area to decarbonise, including through collaborative measures with local businesses, other local authorities, or via the Local Enterprise Partnership. Most councils (73%) work in partnership with local businesses to encourage decarbonisation, whereas the remaining 102 councils do not. Councils engaging with local businesses were likely to score marginally better on average across all sections than councils who do not work with local businesses. Counties benefited from encouraging businesses in decarbonisation, typically scoring 21 percentage points higher overall than those who did not.

**Councils working with local businesses were more likely to score highly on the Collaboration & Engagement section than those who do not.**
This may be due to councils who work with local businesses being more likely to work with other groups (e.g. health services, schools and other councils), potentially benefiting from existing networks and to then use these connections to fund community action.

**Councils who work in partnership with local businesses are better able to have officers working on setting retrofit targets and household energy efficiency projects. They are also more likely to offer residents options to purchase renewable energy more cheaply and progressing towards sustainable neighbourhoods (e.g. 15/20-minute neighbourhoods) through the Local Plan.**
In contrast, councils who do not work in partnership with local businesses scored higher on topics which are in the council's direct control and are less likely to require partnerships with businesses. Topics focused on 20 mph speed zones, wildlife sites in positive conservation management and reducing household waste produced. This demonstrates that engaging with the private sector enables councils to target action beyond their direct control and better integrate emissions reductions across their local areas through quality engagement.

Engaging with local businesses is a stepping stone into working with other groups across the borough to help accelerate carbon reductions. Given councils are in direct control of approximately **2-5%** of the emissions within their boundary, they will need to engage with businesses and other partnerships to progress action beyond emissions within their direct control.

22. Analysis for engaging with the private sector uses Collaboration & Engagement, Question 10.

# 73%

**Most councils (73%) work in partnership with local businesses to encourage decarbonisation.**

# 6th

**councils working in partnership with local businesses on decarbonisation ranked 6th in relation to the positive impact it gave to a council's average score.**

# 2-5%

**Councils are in direct control of approximately 2-5% of the emissions within their boundary.**

# +21%

**Counties benefited from encouraging businesses in decarbonisation, typically scoring 21 percentage points higher overall than those who did not.**

**Characteristic I**

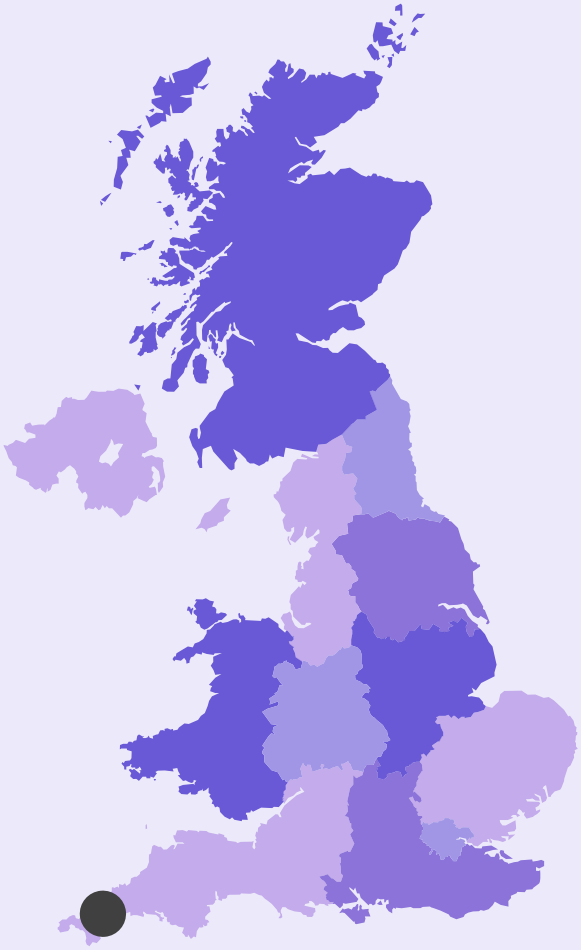
## Case study:

### Cornwall Council

Cornwall Council scored 52% on their Climate Action Scorecard, 16% higher than the single tier average. In particular, the council scored high above the average in Planning & Land Use (45%), Collaboration & Engagement (29%) and Governance & Finance (26%).

Cornwall Council works in partnership with local businesses on decarbonisation through the **Cornwall Sustainability Awards** on the **Carbon Neutral Hive** website. The council also supports other groups across the region including a section on the Carbon Neutral Hive site for **young people to get involved** and a page on their **council website** to help residents, communities and organisations understand what they can do.

Importantly, Cornwall Council signpost a **range of funds** including a **climate and nature fund** to support communities financially (up to £5,000) on projects and activities that embed climate action. One such project is called '**Revitalise Cornwall's Woods**', where funds contribute to increasing biodiversity, resilience and carbon sequestration.



# 52%

**Cornwall Council scored 52% on their Climate Action Scorecard.**

Characteristic I

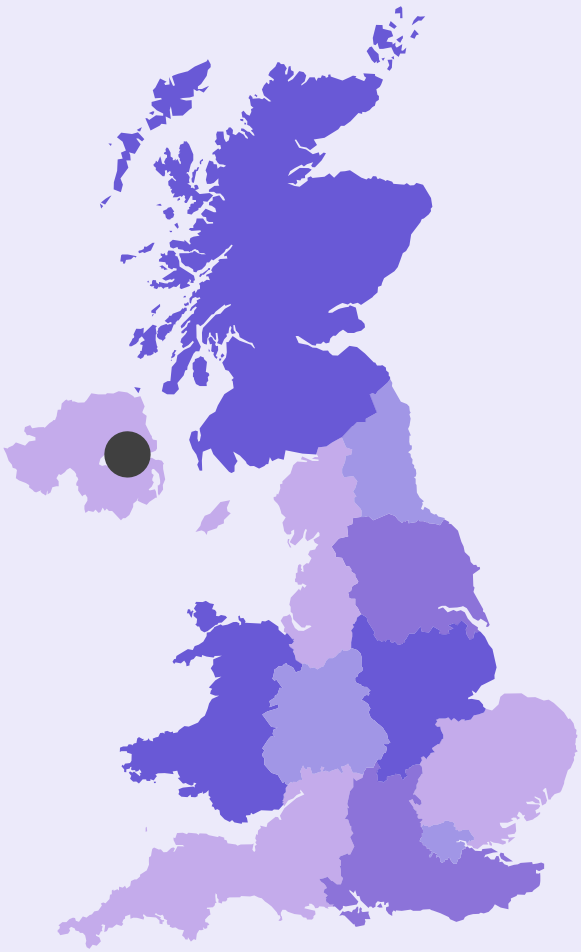
# Case study:

## Belfast City Council

Belfast City Council is the top scoring Northern Irish council with a Climate Action Scorecard of 43%. Across all sectors of the Action Scorecard, the council achieves above average scores for Northern Irish councils.

In 2020, Belfast City Council published their '**Belfast's Resilience Ambitions: A climate plan for Belfast**' which aims to identify stresses and shocks for the city, and improve the knowledge of existing and emerging risks. Within this document a programme called 'Architects of Change' was created to help train businesses to adopt environmental, social and sustainable practices. Businesses receive mentoring, materials, and consultancy services to ensure sustainable growth beyond the training programme. Additionally, the council website has a dedicated section called '**City for business**' which contains several different sub sections e.g. City for start-ups, Partner support, City for investment and Belfast Business Promise, to cater to a range of businesses' needs.

Belfast City Council's '**Social Value Procurement Policy**' aims to work with businesses who have a strong focus on ethics, people and the environment. Objective four encourages procuring materials from renewable and sustainable sources within their supply chain. Working with sustainable suppliers will not only encourage local businesses to reduce their emissions to win the work but also reduce the council's scope 3 emissions profile.



**43%**

**Belfast City Council is the top scoring Northern Irish council with a Council Climate Action Scorecard of 43%.**

# **Characteristic J:** Contrasting rural and urban authorities

Councils across the UK can be classified as rural or urban from scores provided in government datasets. 59% of councils across the UK are classified as being urban (defined by having a high number of residents within an area), the remaining 41% are classed as rural councils (defined by having fewer number of residents within an area in their boundary).

**Across all characteristics analysed in this report, councils being urban (as opposed to rural) ranked 9th compared to other characteristics in how it elevates a council's average score across the whole Scorecard.** Councils which are identified as urban scored four percentage points more than rural councils across all sections of the Scorecard. Urban and rural single-tier authorities show no difference between their overall Scorecard percentage, but urban district authorities were likely to answer better overall. Urban councils in Scotland and Northern Ireland scored four and eight percentage points higher than their rural counterparts, whereas Wales had no difference.

**Urban councils scored higher on questions within the Transport sector than rural councils. Urban councils are more likely to support decarbonisation efforts by encouraging active travel and switching to low emission buses.** Urban councils scored relatively highly, at least twice as well than rural councils, on questions relating to switching to low emission buses. This distinction may be due to urban areas typically having higher bus usage, which is likely to lead to greater investment into low emission buses to reduce air pollution. As opposed to rural areas, where keeping routes available is their priority. Additionally, councils across the UK are pushing for **World Health Organisation's (WHO) air pollution standards by 2030**.

Urban councils were notably more likely to be take action on embedding circular economy principles, building sustainable food partnerships and supporting local food production. Urban councils scored twice as well on implementing projects to reduce meat consumption.

**Rural councils scored better than urban councils on approving planning applications for new or extended solar, wind, battery storage or district heat networks.** The result could be due to rural council's availability and suitability for renewable energy projects, which is likely to lead to greater investment and therefore working with specialist legal and technical partners to maximise planning application success.

Other question topics which were answered better by rural councils included requiring higher water efficiency in new homes and a higher number of staff working on implementing their CAP of climate change projects. Further, rural councils scored more positively on offering information to residents on behaviour changes on the council's website and working in partnership with local businesses on decarbonising.

All councils can participate in the **Countryside Climate Network (CNN)**, which aims to deliver climate action across all communities and amplify rural potential. This network is one way in which neighbouring areas, regardless of urban or rural differences, can see any actions that could be scaled or leveraged, all while accounting for the different priorities for each area.

Urban and rural areas have demonstrated key strengths and weaknesses in different areas, with rural areas performing better on engaging and working in partnership with stakeholders and would benefit from focusing action on infrastructure measures, an area where urban councils performed better. **Since both groups of local authorities scored similarly, councils should identify their areas of strength and weakness through this lens and adopt best practice from their counterparts.**

# +4%

**Councils which are identified as urban scored four percentage points more than rural councils across all sections of the Scorecard.**

# +4-8%

**Urban councils in Scotland and Northern Ireland scored four and eight percentage points higher than their rural counterparts.**

# 9th

**Across all characteristics analysed in this report, councils being urban (as opposed to rural) ranked 9th compared to other characteristics in how it elevates a council's average score across the whole Scorecard.**

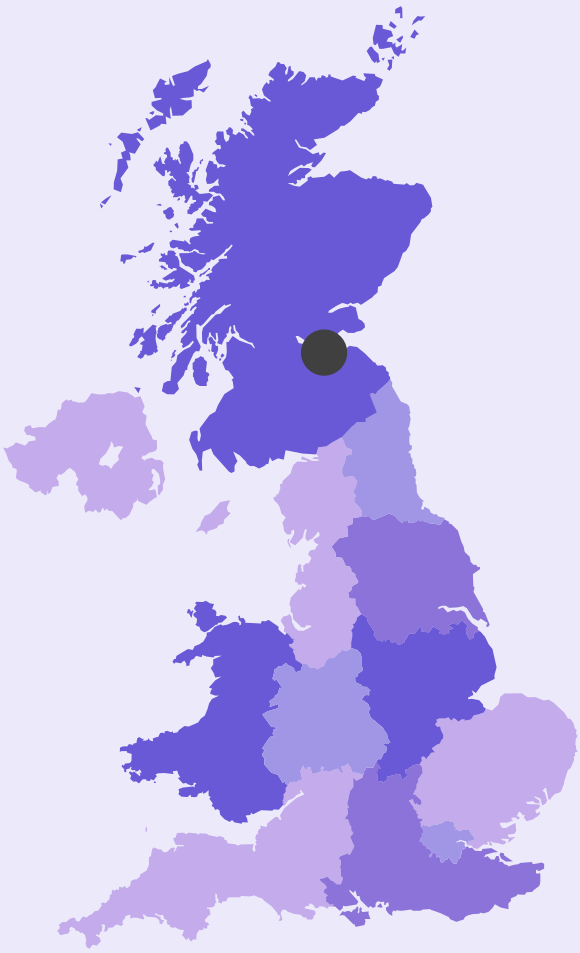
**Characteristic J**

# Case study:

## City of Edinburgh Council

The City of Edinburgh Council, classified as an urban council, is in the top five scoring single-tier authorities (58% overall score on their Action Scorecard), with an above average score in the Transport section. The urban council scored well on topics relating to supporting active travel and switching to low emissions buses. Within their **2030 Climate Strategy**, the transport sector is noted as the second largest contributor to their emissions profile. The third priority in the strategy is accelerating the decarbonisation of public transport, which aligns with the question topics above, indicating that this is a priority.

Urban areas typically have **higher public transport use** and therefore it is important for the services to be decarbonised. The City of Edinburgh Council has taken measures to decarbonise the transport sector through technology and behaviour changes. They have published an **Active Travel Improvements Programme** containing a list of projects which will be implemented over the years until 2026, to support behaviour changes. A **low emission zone** has been implemented across the city to promote active travel and public transport by restricting access from polluting vehicles and investing in **electric double decker buses**.



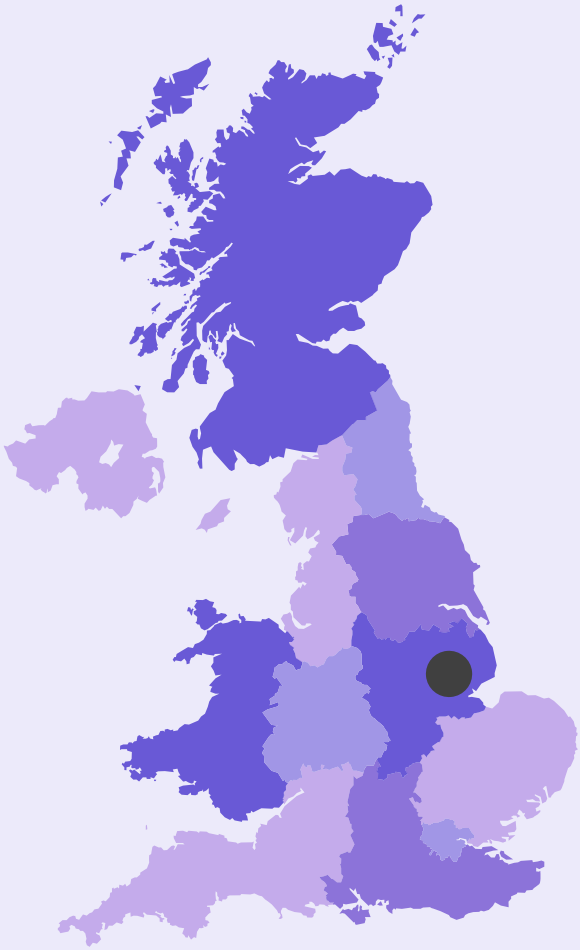
# 58%

**The City of Edinburgh Council, classified as an urban council, is in the top five scoring single-tier authorities (58% overall score on their Council Climate Action Scorecard).**

**Characteristic J**

# Case study:

## North Kesteven District Council



North Kesteven District Council, classified as a rural council, scored 14 percentage points above the average score for District councils on the Action Scorecards. In particular, the rural council scored 50 percentage points above average for the Planning & Land Use sector.

The council has adopted the **Central Lincolnshire Local Plan**, along with the City of Lincoln and West Lindsey District, which allows decision making on planning applications across the three authorities. A supplementary interactive **Policies Map** has been produced alongside the Local Plan. The interactive map identifies a range of different policies mapped out through geographical representation, including 'locations suitable for large scale wind turbines'. This dataset highlights suitable areas across the three authorities where medium to large wind turbines can be installed. The authorities working cross-boundary has enabled resource sharing through unifying planning applications and increased the area for renewable energy generation.

Additionally, North Kesteven District Council scored 28 percentage points above the average score for District councils on Collaboration & Engagement. The council scored well on providing residents with information on adopting climate friendly behaviours through their **sustainability** page and the option to make a **climate pledge**. The council also provides support and advice for businesses through **BusinessNK**, to promote sustainable growth and maximise opportunities of the green economy. The variety of well-performing areas between North Kesteven District Council and the City of Edinburgh Council demonstrates the significant potential learnings that councils can take from each other across urban-rural boundaries.

**+14%**

**North Kesteven District Council, classified as a rural council, scored 14 percentage points above the average score for District councils on the Action Scorecards.**

# **Characteristic K:** Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) rating

The **Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)** is an official measure of relative deprivation for areas across the United Kingdom. The IMD rating considers a wide range of aspects that typically affect a person's living conditions including income, employment, education, health and disability, crime, barriers to housing and services. This characteristic focuses on councils which are either more deprived or less deprived according to their IMD scores.

**Among all the characteristics analysed in this report, councils who are considered to be less deprived ranked 11th, compared to other characteristics, in terms of the increase it gave to a council's average score.** Just under half of councils across the UK are considered to be **less deprived**, while the remaining 53% of councils are more deprived. Less deprived councils overall scored 1 percentage point more than more deprived councils across all sections of the Scorecard. Less deprived district and single-tier authorities typically scored three and two percentage points higher respectively. Interestingly across the Scorecard, English councils showed little difference between their IMD classification and their score, whereas more deprived councils in Northern Ireland score more positively than less deprived councils. Less deprived Scottish and Welsh councils were more likely to score positively than their more deprived counterparts across the sections of the Council Climate Action Scorecards.

Councils in less deprived areas scored higher in the Buildings & Heating section. Specifically, these areas also demonstrated more action on council homes (either owned or managed) by implementing projects to increase energy efficiency and implementing retrofit schemes. Over time this can be expected to reduce deprivation in these areas further, given the established link between warm and comfortable housing and health outcomes. Less deprived councils scored almost twice as high on these questions than more deprived councils.

**Less deprived councils have a notable ability to create partnerships with businesses, which may help in advancing action through their support (e.g. best practices, their skills, provide funding), and are more likely to provide guidance on behaviour changes residents can take on their council website.** Less deprived councils were more likely to have a higher area wide recycling rate and increase staff time working on climate action of climate change projects. Both topics scored twice as well compared to more deprived councils. This may be due to increased capacity of staff within less deprived areas, potentially due to more available funding. More deprived areas received **15% larger cuts** to council services when their net service expenditure is compared to less deprived areas between 2009-10 and 2019-20. Limited funding in these areas may therefore contribute to the difference seen between the Scorecards performance for more and less deprived areas.

The Scorecard data shows that **IMD scores do not have a significant impact on action being taken. The exceptions were Transport, Planning & Land Use, and Waste Reduction & Food, where more deprived councils scored slightly higher**. In particular, questions within the Scorecards on supporting retrofitting through partnerships or programmes, supporting active travel, participating in food partnerships and parks awarded Green Flag status were scored better by more deprived councils. Deprived areas may have different priorities to less deprived areas and therefore would tackle different areas. The role of whether an area is urban or rural may also impact the different areas tackled, with urban areas in the UK tending to be more deprived, with **12% of urban residents** in areas within the most deprived 10% of the IMD in 2019, compared to just 1% of rural residents.

Councils which are more deprived could look to embed net zero within their policy documents including their corporate, mid-term financial and procurement plans as this may stimulate climate action across the council. Opportunities for alternative funding models may also benefit more

deprived areas to tackle actions requiring more staff resource and capital costs. When internal documents are being refreshed, opportunities to level up communities and embed the just transition principles should be maximised. This approach will bring along and support different groups who will be able to contribute to meaningful climate action. Less deprived councils, on the other hand, may focus on additionally assisting the decarbonisation transition through supporting active travel and adopt circular economy through joining food partnerships and creating a food strategy.

# 47%

**Just under half of councils across the UK are considered to be less deprived.**

# 11th

**Among all the characteristics analysed in this report, councils who are considered to be less deprived ranked 11th, compared to other characteristics, in terms of the increase it gave to a council's average score.**

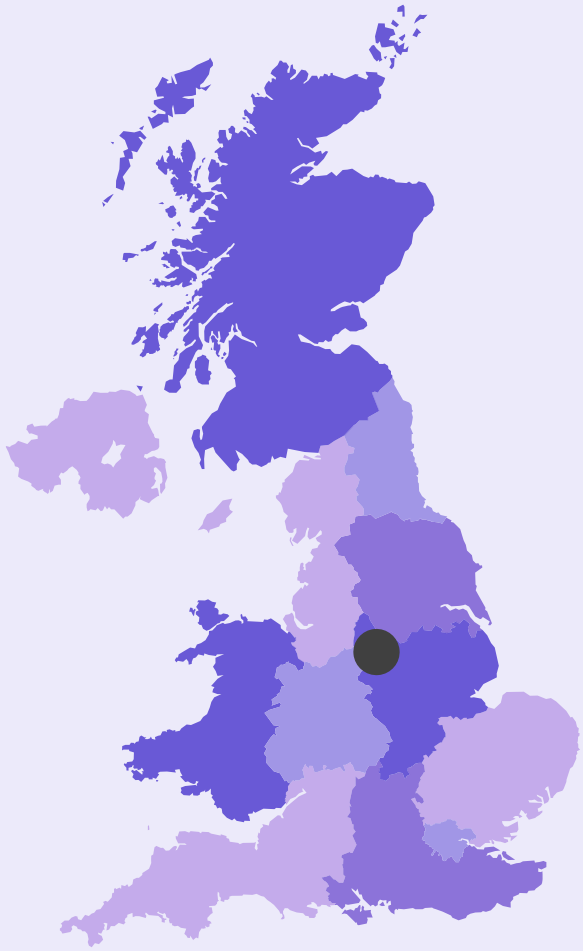
**Characteristic K**

## Case study:

### Derbyshire Dales District Council

Derbyshire Dales District Council, a less deprived council, scored 36% overall on their Climate Action Scorecard (compared to a 29% average for district councils). The council scored 71% in the Buildings & Heating section where the average was only 42%. The council scored full marks relating to questions on energy efficiency homes and has a costed plan to retrofit all council owned and managed homes.

The council has won funding to **improve energy efficiency** in off-gas housing where residents are fuel poor and offers funding to **low income households** to make their own homes more energy efficient. Derbyshire Dales District Council has been shortlisted for **Council of the Year** category by UK Housing Awards due to identifying new affordable housing, retrofitting homes and restarting the councils housing programme.



# 36%

**Derbyshire Dales District Council, a less deprived council, scored 36% overall on their Climate Action Scorecard.**

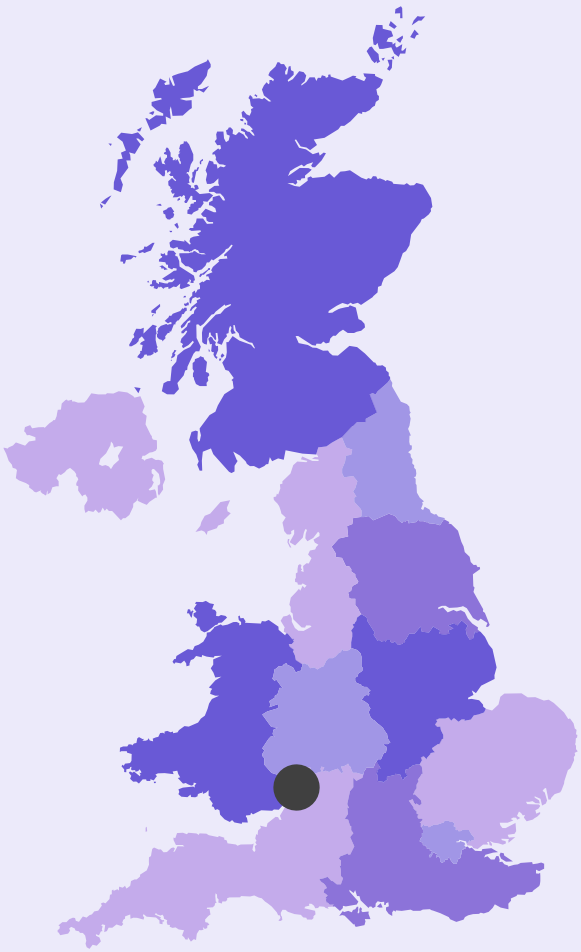
Characteristic K

# Case study:

## Gloucester City Council

Gloucester City Council, a more deprived council, scored 22% on their Climate Action Scorecard.

The council did however score above average by 12 percentage points on the Buildings & Heating section. The council offers several **different financial schemes**, which are mostly funded by the government, to help improve energy efficiency in homes. For example, the **Home Upgrade Grant** scheme, funded by the UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, is aimed at households who have a low income, live in a property classified as EPC D, E, F, G and do not use gas. The boiler and heating grant applies to privately rented and low-income owner-occupied homes who have central heating, where successful applicants will benefit from an air or ground source heat pump. Additionally, residents can receive free and impartial advice through **Warm and Well**. The website also provides case studies, grants and funding and home visits to ensure all residents have access to the information they require.



**22%**

**Gloucester City Council, a more deprived council, scored 22% on their Council Climate Action Scorecard.**

# **Characteristic L:** Membership of a combined authority

There are 10 combined authorities (CA) within England, plus the Greater London Authority (GLA), which is a mayoral authority. Climate Emergency UK included the GLA alongside the combined authorities due to similarities in their powers. Together, their membership makes up around 50 local councils, plus a further 32 (and the City of London) in the GLA. Combined authorities are responsible for some devolved governance functions among a collective group of councils usually linked by an economic and geographic region. In principle, this allows councils to be more ambitious with their policy programmes. There are no combined authorities in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

Combined authorities were assessed according to a different methodology because of the difference in funding and powers to the other UK councils. This section discusses how the English member councils within local authorities fared compared to English councils who are not members of a combined authority. Members of the GLA have also been excluded from this analysis.

**There is little difference in the overall scores between local authorities who are members of a combined authority versus those who are not.** The average Scorecard total score is 4 percentage points higher among non-CA members. At the section level, there are also very limited deviations, with the most notable differences found in the Transport and Planning & Land Use sections.

**Within Transport questions, efforts to support active travel and shared transport schemes were scored higher among CA member councils.** Combined authority members are more likely to include the area-wide Net Zero target as part of its Local Plan as well as mandate a minimum requirement for renewable energy sources on new building developments.

Other areas of the Scorecards that were answered better by CA-based authorities include home retrofitting programmes, where proportionally double the number of percentage points were scored by CA-based councils, as well as tree coverage targets. Most funding schemes for building retrofit from central government are administered or applied for through consortiums of councils, which are often led by combined authorities. This may contribute to the positive impact in home retrofitting programmes. Council lobbying questions were also more highly scored by members of combined authorities.

Non-CA members demonstrated stronger performance across many of the Scorecards' questions, particularly around wildlife areas being in positive conservation management, though this may be explained by the overrepresentation of urban areas within combined authorities. Kerbside recycling was also more prevalent in non-CA member councils by a significant margin, which may be explained by spatial constraints often experienced in urban areas limiting kerbside recycling.

Member councils of combined authorities benefit from the additional resources and collective progress offered by economic and geographic overlaps, demonstrated by their relatively strong performance on Transport and Planning sections. **There is, however, evidence to suggest that CA membership can lead to individual member councils scoring more poorly on their individual efforts to engage with businesses and provide funding for community action through resources such as environment funds.** As Governance & Finance questions are (relatively) poorly answered by both combined authorities and their individual member authorities, this does raise the question as to whether there are gaps within the approach of these councils.

## Combined authority performance within the Scorecards

The ten English combined authorities and the GLA were also scored on their own specialised set of questions as part of the Scorecard assessment. Whilst the responsibilities and mandates of combined authorities vary from local authorities, we can garner similar insights into their climate action performance according to various characteristics. An additional caveat with these results is that the sample size of authorities is much smaller than in the local authority analysis and that no other devolved nations apart from England have an equivalent combined authority structure.

**Combined authorities scored on average much higher than local authorities (46% average weighted score), performing especially well in questions relating to Buildings, Heating & Green Skills (60% of available marks) and Collaboration & Engagement (55%).**

Combined authorities with a climate portfolio holder are far more likely to use political channels such as lobbying and mayoral pressure on national government to improve the availability of powers, funding, and resources on climate action.

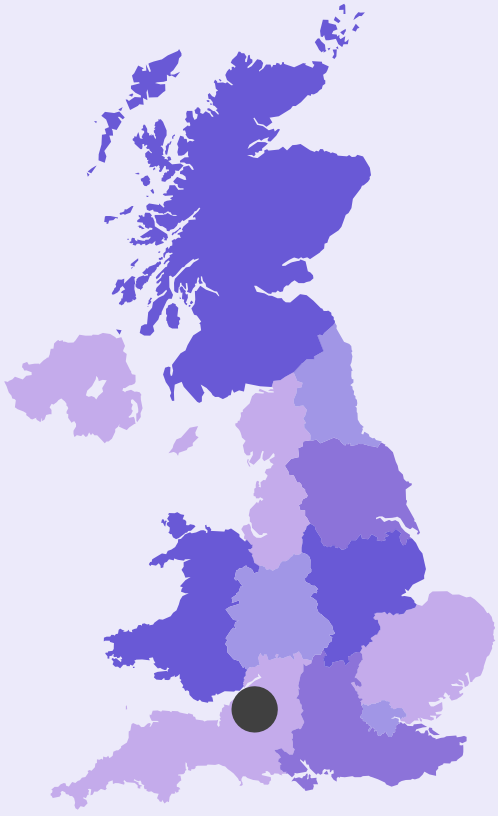
**Characteristic L**

# Case study:

## Bath and North East Somerset Council

Bath and North East Somerset Council (BANES), is an example of a single tier council which benefits from being a member of the West of England Combined Authority. The council is the 7th best single tier performing council (scoring 57% on their Climate Action Scorecard) and is the best performing council in Buildings & Heating (scoring 84%), which was a sector with some of the questions most positively impacted by combined authority membership.

As part of the West of England Combined Authority, BANES residents are eligible for Skills Bootcamps courses offering training in green skills. BANES has also received **grant funding** from central government through the West of England Combined Authority to install active travel infrastructure, demonstrating the potential for combined authority membership to aid climate action by providing funding and training opportunities.



# 57%

**The council is the 7th best single tier performing council (scoring 57% on their Council Climate Action Scorecard).**

Combined authorities have also been much more successful in delivering training and development courses in some way related to green skills, likely due to the funding and powers that have been devolved on skills training. Both areas are commonly identified at local authority level as being difficult to coordinate and implement in isolation. Therefore, combined authorities have a key role in supporting other local councils by leading transition to a low carbon workforce.

There is a strong overlap between authorities with higher staff resourcing and the provision of support for climate action delivered within the local community. This includes renewable energy schemes and actions related to biodiversity as well as undertaking studies and research to determine opportunities for retrofitting. Engagement with businesses external partners (including other councils) is also much stronger where additional staff resources are available. This is contrasted against areas where additional staff resourcing had little to no benefit, such as the integration of climate into other council planning documents (e.g. Transport Plan, Spatial Planning Strategy). Authorities that have published SMART climate strategies (and provided updates to those strategies) are committed to an evidence-based approach to defining climate actions. Virtually all those authorities have completed additional research into scoping opportunities for retrofitting, renewable energy and green skills assessments as well as conducting engagement with residents in communities vulnerable to climate change.

The group of combined authorities which have included net zero targets within their corporate plans overlaps strongly with the group of local authorities who have created a climate change commission to design policies relating to climate action. There is limited evidence otherwise that "ambitious target setting" has a positive impact on combined authority scores.

CAs answered much more poorly on Governance & Finance questions across the board (scoring 29% of available marks) relative to other sections. For example, no authorities have banned high carbon sponsorships and advertising whilst only one authority has passed a motion in support of fossil fuel divestment and only one has committed to divesting its pension funds from fossil fuels. Of characteristics assessed for combined authorities, staff resourcing had the most positive impact on improving Governance & Finance questions scores.

**Whilst scores across combined authorities tell a positive story of climate action, it is clear that there are potential areas for further progress; the "joining-up" of council plans and strategies with its climate resources (e.g. partnerships, climate-focused policies & assessments, staff time) could be an area of focus for authorities with available climate staff.** An obvious developmental point for the authorities without climate strategies is to improve the base of underpinning research and evidence to properly inform their climate response. Focus should also be given to areas where combined authorities can leverage their collective membership, in areas such as lobbying and cross-cutting projects such as skills development.

# **Characteristic M:** Cross party representation

Cross-party representation refers to a council where no one party has overall control of the administration and multiple parties lead the council (also known as a minority administration). This question assesses whether having a minority administration running a council either hinders or facilitates decision making and action on climate given the potentially differing party objectives and priorities of elected council members, or the ability to reach cross-party consensus and support.

Cross-party representation ranked last in its influence on improving councils scores and had an overall limited negative impact on the performance of councils. 40% of councils were deemed as having a minority administration. **No sections positively benefited from a minority administration, with Governance & Finance the most negatively impacted sector. The impact on scores varied, however, for the different tiers of authority.** County councils scored notably higher with minority administrations and single-tier authorities experienced a small decrease.

Geographically, Scottish local authorities saw an overall small positive correlation with having a minority administration. Scottish local authorities with minority administrations scored higher in Governance & Finance, which contrasts with the wider trend across the other geographic areas which scored lower. In Scottish and Northern Irish voting systems, it is considered **easier for multiple parties to win considerable numbers of seats** when compared to England's "first past the post system". Scottish local authorities may have, therefore, developed more successful cross-party working practices than English counterparts.

**40%**

**40% of councils were deemed as having a minority administration.**

Minority administrations scored lower in all Collaboration & Engagement questions. Additionally, Buildings & Heating questions regarding renewable energy purchasing schemes and retrofitting partnerships saw the most significant decrease in scores, followed by Collaboration & Engagement questions regarding lobbying of national government and working in partnerships. Partnerships with external stakeholders seemed to be a key area where minority administrations scored lower than majority administrations.

Councils with minority administrations should look to improve their Collaboration & Engagement with key stakeholders both internally and externally to improve governance practices but also target high-emitting sectors, such as Buildings & Heating. **The results from the Scorecards indicate that minority administrations face bigger challenges than those with majority administrations and should consider developing working practices which aid progress and facilitate cross-party collaboration.**

# Conclusion

Local authorities across the UK have made progress to reduce their emissions but are currently not on track to deliver the reductions needed by 2030 to limit the most serious impacts of the climate crisis. The overall average score across local authorities within the 2023 Council Climate Action Scorecards was around 30% (depending on council type). The best performing sector across all councils was Collaboration & Engagement (49%), followed by Buildings & Heating (45%), and Waste Reduction & Food (30%). The best scoring councils have various characteristics in common, most notably they have internal leadership with a dedicated climate portfolio holder and strategic plans that promote accountability and regular reporting and monitoring. Councils with ambitious decarbonisation targets are also linked to more ambitious climate action.

External factors that contributed to increased climate action were councils who, often facing funding challenges, were connected to external networks of businesses, residents, and other organisations. In addition, councils that have launched a climate bond or equivalent are leading the way on climate, demonstrating that once low-hanging fruit actions have been taken, this is an exciting and impactful next step. Better coordination between different tiers of authority may further boost climate action across the UK.

**30%**

**The overall average score across local authorities within the 2023 Council Climate Action Scorecards was around 30% (depending on council type).**

**49%**

**The best performing section across all councils was Collaboration & Engagement (49%).**

**45%**

**Followed by Buildings & Heating (45%).**

**30%**

**and Waste Reduction & Food (30%).**

# Appendix

## List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **CA** | Combined Authority |
| **CAP** | Climate Action Plan |
| **CCC** | Climate Change Committee |
| **CDP** | Carbon Disclosure Project |
| **CIL** | Community Infrastructure Levy |
| **CMI** | Community Municipal Investment |
| **CNN** | Country Climate Network |
| **CRF** | Common Reporting Framework |
| **DEFRA** | Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs |
| **DESNZ** | Department for Energy Security and Net Zero |
| **EPC** | Energy Performance Certificate |
| **EV** | Electric Vehicle |
| **GCoM** | Global Covenant of Mayors |
| **GLA** | Greater London Authority |
| **IMD** | Indices of Multiple Deprivation |
| **LGA** | Local Government Association |
| **LTN** | Low Traffic Neighbourhood |
| **MEES** | Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards |
| **NGO** | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **ONS** | Office National Statistics |
| **SCATTER** | Setting City Area Targets and Trajectories for Emissions Reduction |
| **SMART** | Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound |
| **WHO** | World Health Organisation |

CLIMATE EMERGENCY UK