West Midlands

Local Authority Sustainability Benchmark 2022

Summary report

sustainability
west midlands

Environment
Agency

Report information

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About Sustainability West Midlands

Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) was established in 2002 as an independent, not-for-profit company and is the sustainability adviser for the leaders of the West Midlands.

Our vision is that the West Midlands is leading in contributing to the national target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 whilst addressing health inequality and driving inclusive growth. We monitor the West Midlands Sustainability 2030 Roadmap which acts as a framework that all organisations based or operating in the region can use to help them make changes to their activities in the knowledge that they will contribute to wider regional ambition.

SWM's support our members and other local stakeholders in the public, private and third sectors to implement these changes by enabling them to demonstrate innovation and leadership and provide opportunities to collaborate and celebrate success.

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Contents

1 Introduction

This document provides a summary of the progress that local authorities in the West Midlands are making against various aspects of sustainability associated with West Midlands Sustainability Roadmap to 2030. It gives local authorities and their supporting organisations, including SWM and the funders for this work, the Environment Agency, a clearer idea of:

- Good practice emanating from local authorities that could be scaled-up or replicated elsewhere.
- The influence that policy is having on local authority activity.
- Gaps in progress whereby further support or funding is required.
- Patterns of progress, e.g. against different Roadmap themes, or in different locations (urban vs. rural, county vs. district, etc.).

The benchmark can also be used independently by local authorities on an annual basis to self-assess their progress on sustainability and to more quickly identify where they should take further action.

It can also help supporting organisations, such as national Government (BEIS, Defra etc.), the Local Government Association (LGA), the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to better understand where their support would be most welcomed.

This report summarises the findings and provides the recommendations. The full report, including detailed findings, methodology, case studies and local authority rankings, is not published externally and has been sent directly to the councils that participated.

2   Summary of results

This section shows how the local authorities that responded to our request to complete the benchmark, 21 out of 32, rank against each SWM's Sustainability Roadmap to 2030 themes.

In short, this shows that the most progress is being made against the implementation of policies and programmes associated with sustainable energy. The area where progress is slowest is on local authority responses to changing climatic conditions, i.e. climate adaptation.

Roadmap symbol	2022		2021	
	Average % score	Rank	Average % score	Rank
CO_2	67.7	**1**	49.2	4
(scales)	67.5	**2**	52.9	2
(water)	65.5	**3**	48.4	5
(tree)	63.5	**4**	50.0	3
(wind turbine)	61.7	**5**	56.0	1
Various	60.7	**6**	46.5	7
(recycling)	56.1	**7**	46.8	6
(bicycle)	52.6	**8**	44.2	8
(hand with plant)	51.2	**9**	40.3	9
(flood)	43.8	**10**	33.1	10

'Various' refers to a question in the benchmark that covers multiple or all Roadmap themes; this could be a question on governance and communications, for example.

3 Summary of findings against Roadmap themes

This section provides a breakdown of the results of the scoring by each of the eight Roadmap themes, along with metrics aligned to the regional carbon reduction target of Net Zero by 2050 ('CO_2') and metrics that can affect many or all Roadmap themes ('Various').

3.1 Carbon emissions

Progress rank: First out of 10 Roadmap themes (+3 places compared to 2021)

Summary of findings
- A vast majority of councils have set carbon reduction targets for their own estates, with even more now having a clearer picture of what their emissions currently are.
- Most local authorities annually report on their emissions.
- Fewer local authorities have set carbon reduction targets for their local areas, but this has increased since last year. A significant increase in progress also comes with council's being confident that they are on track to meet these targets; only a quarter stated that they were on track last year, but over half have this year.
- Local authorities are progressing reasonably well with implementing carbon reduction plans.
- However, many local authorities are struggling with the decarbonisation of buildings, with slower progress being made on this, albeit with an increase of 11 percentage points compared to last year.

Specific CO_2 recommendations for local authorities
- Utilise the SCATTER tool to set a realistic and scientifically validated carbon baseline and target for your local area.
- Work with local partners (especially enveloping and neighbouring authorities) to implement carbon reduction plans that are action-orientated. Support those authorities that are performing more slowly towards the shared goal.
- Influence the council's planning department to ensure all new developments have strong low carbon standards embedded.
- Ensure all new projects commissioned by the council consider their impact on carbon emissions and, therefore, your council's ability to meet its carbon reduction targets.
- Gain advice and support from your local Midlands Net Zero Hub representative.
- Apply for the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and/or other Salix funding to provide resource for rapid decarbonisation of internal building stock.

3.2 Resource efficiency

Progress rank: Seventh out of 10 Roadmap themes (-1 place compared to 2021)

Summary of findings
- Converse to carbon emissions, councils are making better progress at setting waste reduction / recycling targets for their area rather than for their own estate. This may be because waste collections, which are lower-tier council responsibility, make it easier to monitor waste flows across their local areas.

- There is decent progress on the establishment of waste and resource plans for local authority areas, but slower progress on influencing sustainable and ethical procurement practices. However, the latter has improved by 14 percentage points since last year.
- There are some good examples of local authorities implementing waste reduction, recycling and re-use projects in their councils. However, progress is highly variable depending on the local authority, as the rankings suggest.

Specific Resource Efficiency recommendations
- Plan ahead to address the implications of policy and regulation for households and businesses. The Resources and Waste Strategy for England sets out the Government's ambitions for more and better-quality recycling, increased resource efficiency and a more circular economy. The Government are committed to a suite of measures to reform the current waste system including a commitment to improve recycling rates in England to achieve a 65% municipal recycling rate by 2035. The Environment Bill introduces legislation so that all English collectors of waste will have to collect a core set of recycling materials of plastic, glass, metal, paper and card, food and garden waste from households, businesses and other organisations such as schools.
- WRAP (Waste and Recycling Action Programme) provide useful information for local authorities and organisations in relation to waste minimisation and recycling. Monitor their website and communications for information which can be shared locally.
- Consider supporting the establishment of a 'Resource Efficiency Cluster', bringing businesses together to reduce their environmental impact and generate benefits. This is done by sharing resources and best practice and collaborating. Resource efficiency clusters typically focus on how resources are used, particularly focusing on reducing waste, energy and water use, and minimising pollution and costs. SWM have undertaken detailed research into this approach in Telford & Wrekin on behalf of the Local Government Association.
- Undertake regular waste composition analysis to understand the make-up of waste across the area, the capture rates for current recycling schemes, and the opportunity to divert more waste from landfill or incineration.
- Use the findings of the waste composition analysis to design engagement campaigns to encourage greater capture rates for existing recycling collections.
- Prioritise the diversion of organic waste from landfill to avoid the production of methane, a very damaging greenhouse gas. If necessary, engage with specialist advisers to consider the best option for diverting organic waste from landfill giving consideration to minimisation (home composting), collection and treatment options (for food and garden waste).

3.3   Clean and Active Travel

- *Promoting an active, accessible and connected lifestyle for everyone regardless of demographics.*
- *By 2030, one third of all trips made by walking or cycling*
- *By 2030, 50-70% of new car sales should be Ultra Low Emission Vehicles*

Progress rank: Eighth out of 10 Roadmap themes (no change compared to 2021)

Summary of findings
- Fairly slow progress has been made with the implementation of sustainable travel plans or associated targets to reduce car usage.
- However, there has been quite a significant improvement in councils providing incentives to staff to use public and active transport more often.

- Low emission vehicle uptake, especially within council fleets, has been good, possibly accelerated by the priorities of the Midlands Net Zero Hub and the Government's national electric vehicle target. However, progress has not improved compared to last year, which suggests uptake in low emission vehicles is slower than it needs to be.
- Overall, low carbon vehicles has been given a greater priority than public or active travel, according to the local authorities that submitted a benchmark response.

Specific Clean and Active Travel recommendations
- Apply to the Government's [electric vehicle charging infrastructure programme](#) to accelerate rollout of a cleaner fleet and to help other local companies do the same.
- Undertake a [fleet review](#) by the Energy Saving Trust.
- Learn from lessons that came about following Covid-19 lockdowns to encourage continued remote working and walking and cycling when travelling is required. Provision of simple information, such as signposting safe walking and cycling routes and green spaces, is a good start.
- Implement council-wide incentives so staff can travel in a more sustainable way, e.g. cycle schemes.
- Support and rollout incentives for local bus use especially in rural areas, the services for which are still being cut due to a combination of Government funding reductions and the impact of Covid-19.

3.4 Clean Air and Water

- *Creating a cleaner environment for all generations to come*
- *By 2030, reduce mortality as a result of PM2.5 pollution exposure by 75% from 2019 levels*

Progress rank: Third out of 10 Roadmap themes (+2 places compared to 2022)

Summary of findings
- It should be noted that there are only two questions asked in the benchmarking process that related directly to clean air and water, although other Roadmap priorities, especially clean and active travel, will have effects on this theme (see other sections of this report).
- Overall, there has been good consideration of pollution issues in local authority areas, but given that the clean and active travel metric is one of the lowest ranked in terms of progress, more needs to be done to ensure air quality levels continue to drop.
- It should also be noted that there is a significant variation in progress and some local authority areas that suffer from the worst air pollution issues are not demonstrating rapid progress, according to this assessment.

Specific Clean Air and Water recommendations
- Learn lessons from the implementation of the [Birmingham Clean Air Zone](#) to ascertain its challenges and successes in order to assess the likely impact of rolling out similar concepts in other high polluting areas.
- Work with organisations such as the Environment Agency (water) and universities (air) to establish monitoring points in local authorities to determine possible pollution hotspots.
- Engage and influence high polluting industries by supporting them with advice on how to reduce their overall emissions, and thus air and water pollutants.
- Accelerate the uptake of clean and active travel options (see 3.3).

3.5 Natural Environment

- *Protecting and conserving the environment so that it thrives with our presence.*

Progress rank: Fourth out of 10 Roadmap themes (-1 place compared to last year)

Summary of findings
- Overall, progress on protecting and enhancing the natural environment by West Midlands authorities is good and improving, with emphasis on planning and action.
- Tree planting, greening buildings and enhancing local biodiversity have been considered by many local authorities, although progress varies significantly between different councils, emphasising the need for more consistent indicators.
- There has been a greater consideration of the concept of biodiversity / environmental net gain compared to last year, perhaps due to the Environment Act passing through Parliament in November 2021.

Specific Natural Environment recommendations
- Engage with local community groups, Environment Agency and your local Wildlife Trust to ensure local authority action taken to improve the natural environment complements existing work.
- Embed 'greening' into planning procedures, for example through the enforcement of Sustainable Drainage Systems or green roofs in developments.
- Authorities within the WMCA should consult the recently published Natural Environment Plan and align their activities with those outlined here.
- Ensure all tree planting programmes are implemented with multiple benefits in mind (for biodiversity enhancement, climate resilience, carbon sequestration etc.)

3.6 Sustainable Growth

- *Empowering the economic development of the West Midlands whilst encouraging environmental improvement.*
- *By 2030, sales in the Low Carbon Goods and Services sector will reach £40 billion.*

Progress rank: Ninth out of 10 Roadmap themes (no change compared to last year)

Summary of findings
- Overall, progress on enhancing sustainable growth remains quite slow, in terms of both embedding the concept of sustainability in local economic growth, and business support.
- There is low transparency of the WMCA Net Zero Business Pledge (see below), and the absence of other similar Pledges outside the WMCA at this point.
- In general, the District and Borough (lower-tier) authorities have been especially slow on action related to this theme, possibly emphasising their view of this being a more top-tier authority role to lead on.
- Unlike most metrics which have shown improvement since last year, the responses to the question 'Does your local authority work with the LEP to support the growth of the local low carbon economy through jobs and skills?' have not improved. This may be due to the various uncertainties around the future of LEPs, risking the stalling of action in this area.

Specific Sustainable Growth recommendations
- Your local authority can signpost businesses across your area to the West Midlands Net Zero Business Pledge to ensure commitments to supporting private sector carbon reduction and business opportunities are made. This is available to all areas of the West Midlands, both inside and outside the WMCA.
- Work with your Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Growth Hubs, Chambers of Commerce, WMCA and the Midlands Net Zero Hub to help these organisations be more confident in providing low carbon and sustainability advice to businesses in their well-established networks.
- Work with LEPs / WMCA to ensure future Strategic Economic Plans consider sustainable growth at their heart, and to implement post-European low carbon funding opportunities for businesses.
- Work closely with your local Green Business Club to channel advice to their local networks. Consider setting up a Club in your area if there is no such network yet established.
- Signpost businesses and support networks to the Innovative Zero Carbon Working Group.

3.7   Social Equity & Health

- *Addressing health inequality to give everyone an equal opportunity in life.*
- *By 2030, achieve a 40% reduction in male and female health inequality from 2019 levels.*
- *By 2030, reduce the proportion of households in fuel poverty by 50% from 2019 levels.*

Progress rank: Second out of 10 Roadmap themes (no change compared to last year)

Summary of findings
- Encouragingly, activity to level up health inequalities is progressing reasonably well, especially around providing support to homes on tackling fuel poverty, crucial given the sharp energy price rises.
- It is to be observed that the Borough and District Councils are generally performing stronger in these areas; this is likely to be as a result of fuel poverty advice largely being the responsibility of lower-tier authorities.
- In light of the impacts resulting from Covid-19, and the evidence that suggests the West Midlands is still suffering from a large health inequality gap, it is encouraging to observe a significant increase in activities that can help to address these issues being implemented by participating councils.

Specific Social Equity & Health recommendations
- Share good examples of fuel poverty campaigns to the areas where performance is poorest and where fuel poverty levels are highest. This will be especially important given the current energy crisis, combined with people being at home more, to ensure the right support is in place for the winter.
- Implement fuel poverty reduction targets to help monitor the success of these measures, using Government data.
- Work with public health teams, local NHS trusts, GPs and other health providers to ensure outcomes that can benefit both health and the environment are rolled out at a large scale, such as active travel programmes and social prescribing schemes.

3.8   Sustainable Energy Use

- *Meeting the energy demand of today and tomorrow, without compromising environment outcomes.*
- *By 2030 achieve a 79% increase in the amount of energy generated by renewables from 2019 levels.*

Progress rank: Fifth out of 10 Roadmap themes (-4 compared to last year)

Summary of findings

- Local authorities' performance on decarbonising and saving energy use is still quite strong but performance in other areas has now overtaken progress in energy-related activity.
- There is a particular push towards investing in improving the energy performance of council estates, utilising funding opportunities such as the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) scheme and Salix.
- The question that focuses on councils actively contributing to a local energy plan still scores lower than 50%, despite all LEP areas having produced an energy plan a few years ago. This suggests engagement or knowledge of the plans is weak or the energy landscape has changed too much for those plans to remain viable.
- We included a new question around councils preparation for energy price rises; it is a little concerning that this has scored quite low overall (and is part of the reason for the overall ranking on the energy priority has come down) given the projected price rises this winter.

Specific Sustainable Energy Use recommendations

- Provide some basic signposting to energy advice, including on renewable energy and how to set up local community energy schemes, on council websites for dissemination through various channels.
- Engage with your local [Midlands Net Zero Hub](#) representative (there are six in the West Midlands, one for each LEP) who can provide support and advice to help accelerate your activity on low carbon energy implementation.
- Ensure all clean energy and energy efficiency schemes are monitored for their impact on carbon emissions to help align with local authority Net Zero targets.
- Ensure that resilience is bult into your energy supply and contracts, and that your local residents are supported with energy price rises via provision of advice and signposting to expertise.

3.9 Adapting to Climate Change

- *Recognising how climate change will affect our lives and how we can effectively respond to it.*

Progress rank: Last out of 10 Roadmap themes (no change compared to last year)

Summary of findings

- Adaptation is where the slowest progress is being made across West Midlands' local authorities. This is consistent with other similar benchmarks we have done in the past.
- Progress is slightly better on tackling flood risk, although this is less surprising given that top-tier councils are Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFA) and, therefore, have a statutory duty to improve flood risk.
- The greatest concern lies with only a handful of local authorities showing evidence that they have produced a climate adaptation plan for either their own estate or the local area. This remains the case, despite recent extreme weather events (e.g. the 2022 heatwave) and the publication of the West Midlands Climate Change Adaptation Plan in late 2021 (see below) which can be used as a framework for LAs for their own areas.

Specific Adapting to Climate Change recommendations

- As referenced above, SWM, in collaboration with the Environment Agency, published the first [West Midlands Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#) in late 2021. This should be consulted by local authorities as it includes actions that they can take forward in their own areas. It can also be used as a format to allow local authorities to produce their own plans at the more local level.

- A first step prior to implementing actions should be to conduct a risk assessment for the local area. This can be based on the West Midlands risk assessment, which is included in the above action plan, and is based on the England Climate Change Risk Assessment published in June 2021.
- Adaptation actions can be implemented into other activities that local authorities may be doing to address other Roadmap themes. Examples include tree planting (natural flood management and urban shading) and decarbonisation of buildings (improving ventilation to prevent overheating). This will help to bring about multiple benefits rather than have to spend money on projects that only focus on climate adaptation.

3.10 Questions that relate to multiple Roadmap themes

This section looks at the remaining questions asked of local authorities during the benchmarking process. This includes more general questions around governance, plans, leadership, engagement and target setting that could affect progress against many or all of the Roadmap themes, or on any other activity that does not fit directly with any of the other Roadmap themes.

Progress rank: Sixth out of 10 themes (+1 compared to last year)

Strongest performing areas (>65% score)
- All but one of the local authorities who returned a response to our request to complete a benchmark spreadsheet have declared a climate emergency.
- Most local authorities have a clearly identified Cabinet Members/Councillor who leads the sustainability, environment or low carbon agenda. There is increasing evidence that these leads now have influence on the sustainability aspects of capital projects.
- Climate change and sustainability is increasingly becoming part of councils' Strategic Plans.
- A majority of local authorities have in place an individual or team at officer level to drive forward sustainability related activity and to embed sustainable thinking into other teams' activities.
- A greater number of local authorities have delivered a form of training to their staff about sustainability in the past year; the score for this metric has risen sharply from 49% to 67%.
- Likewise, the majority of local authorities now lead or contribute to a district or county-wide sustainability working group; the score against this metric has risen from 57% to 81% in the past year.
- More local authorities now publish an annual independent and audited report outlining their progress on sustainability and climate change, alongside communicating this progress publicly.
- Alongside this external facing approach, a greater majority of councils now get their local residents involved in their sustainability-related activities; the score against this metric has risen to 65% from 46% last year.

Weakest performing areas (<50% score) and recommendations
- Few local authorities have built on existing local regulations or policies to help accelerate the delivery of sustainability outcomes, although this is a challenging thing to do especially outside of devolved areas. Engaging with council members is key to this.
- While staff engagement has increased in the past year, the increase in the identification of sustainability or climate change champions in other council departments has been slower; this risks too much of the burden falling on a sustainability officer and not enough embedment across the organisation. Staff training should include a mechanism to allow for the identification of individuals in other teams who may be willing to undertake this role.
- While many councils have set up/are a part of cross sector sustainability working groups to accelerate action, there has been a lack of mapping that has taken place to identify what should be the roles and responsibilities of each group member, or of other organisations who play a key part in achieving local

sustainability objectives. Such mapping would make the working groups more effective and so that collaborative projects can potentially be born.

- Despite an improvement in councils engaging their residents with sustainability related projects, fewer have run Citizen Assemblies. These represent a good way of starting off this process to ensure related actions are resident-led and transparent across the local area and councils that perform poorest on this assessment may wish to consider this approach as one of its first steps.
- Councils are increasingly implementing sustainability action plans, but costing up actions and prioritising these is still happening less readily. This should occur to ensure the actions are realistic and achievable, with alternatives considered if this has not taken place. Action plans that do not contain achievable actions are not effective.

4   Case studies

This section provides a selection of council case studies, one for each Roadmap theme.

**Case study 1: Coventry City Council's progress on carbon reduction**

Rank: Eighth	Score: 73%	↑23% since 2021

Coventry City Council has committed to a 55% reduction in its carbon emissions from 1990 to 2030 for its own estate, alongside being part of the West Midlands Combined Authority's Net Zero target to 2041 for the wider area. The council also surpassed its original 35% reduction by 2020 target, achieving a 62% reduction.

It is already making great strides in meeting these new targets through the rollout of numerous activities, including:

- Producing a Zero Carbon Routemap, setting out how the council can achieve its ambitious short-term targets.
- Analysis of Scope 3 emissions data to identify a clearer picture of the influence that can be held over this challenging aspect of meeting Net Zero, helped by their recent publication of their Corporate Sustainability & Climate Change Strategy.
- The council has calculated its carbon budget and a strategy that sits alongside this is currently going through a consultation.
- Working in partnership with a range of experts who can support projects and to provide expertise; such partners include Cenex, APSE and the Catapults.
- Commitment to the cause at senior level, including a nominated councillor leading on this agenda. Climate change and sustainability is also one of the three top priority areas covered by the One Coventry Plan.
- Coventry is also the first local authority to achieve IEMA accreditation for its one and two day courses on sustainability and climate change.
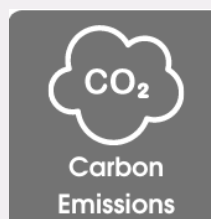
This goes hand in hand with their progress on energy and transport related projects, including:

Transport
- 70 electric vehicles purchased for the Council's fleet through the e-fleet project.
- Around 450 publicly accessible EV charge points have been installed in Coventry, including within residential areas with no off-street parking.
- £50 million grant funding support secured from Government to enable all buses operating in the city and on cross-boundary routes into Warwickshire to be fully electric by 2025.

Energy
- Successful bids for funding against Local Authority Delivery Schemes 2 & 3, HUGS (the Combined Authority's Pilot Neighbourhood Retrofit Programme) and the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Phase 1, working with Citizen Housing to retrofit 90+ houses in the Radford area of the city.
- Also currently working with Eon and Act on Energy on the development of Eon's ECO4 Programme targeting specific neighbourhoods for further retrofit improvements.

Image: St John the Baptist Church, Coventry (Unsplash)

Case study 2: Slim your Bin: Warwickshire County Council's waste reduction approach

Rank: Second=	Score: 88.9%	↑6% since 2021

Warwickshire County Council's waste policies and targets sit under the ISO14001 environmental management system which the council has adopted. The system commits the council to work to prevent pollution, comply with legal requirements and reduce environmental risk. ISO14001 is an accredited certification which means that the councils' actions towards resource efficiency and waste management are carried out in an environmentally competent and cost-efficiency manner.

Supporting a system that minimises resources whilst maximising productivity

The council has put in place facilities for recycling throughout its buildings. Most buildings can recycle the following: paper, card, tins and cans, glass jars and bottles and most plastics. Some of the council's larger offices have in-vessel composters providing the option to recycle food waste. Staff are also encouraged to use the waste hierarchy to minimise the amount of waste they produce, to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. They also help to reduce wasted resources and increase the efficiency of delivered services.

Here are some examples of council projects that have resulted in waste reductions:

- The council has teamed up with Compost Bag Company UK to offer residents discounted compostable caddy liners.
- The council's website offers advice for dealing with green waste, such as composting, food waste recycling and recycling grass cuttings by mulching. The advice on its website ranges from benefits of managing waste correctly to what you can and cannot recycle.
- There is also advice set out on invasive species and waste management, which therefore links to the natural environment Roadmap theme as the advice connects good waste management with biodiversity protection.
- The council also encourages residents to rethink about their waste. The website lists several organisations in the area or online who actively collect certain types of waste and includes companies who focus on circular economy, carbon emissions reduction and stakeholder engagement and collaboration.
- The council has developed a Slim Your Bin campaign to encourage residents to 'waste less and recycle more,' which features a four-week training programme.
- The website also contains an A to Z recycling search function. Users can search how to recycle items, which also offers a map to find out what you can take where.
- There is also extensive engagement with the community across a range of platforms such as magazine ads, press releases, social media, websites, e-newsletters and via the Slim Your Bin scheme.
- All Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) in Warwickshire have a reuse shop where household goods can be donated and bought. This is run by Age UK and local hospices. This applies the principles of a circular economy and adds social value to communities demonstrating best practice by providing holistic solutions to waste issues.

Image: Growing locally (Pixabay)

Case study 3: Birmingham's Zero Emission Vehicle Revolution

Rank: Second=	Score: 71.4%	↑5% since 2021

Birmingham City Council is leading on a range of programmes and initiatives to reduce the reliance on petrol and diesel cars and embrace an electric – and indeed, even more innovative – transportation network. This is crucial in line with the Government's national target to end the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030.

Funding from the Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) was sourced to enable the first phase rollout of 197 chargers and 394 fast and rapid charge points, as part of the emerging twelve year Birmingham Charge Point Strategy to support the transition to electric vehicles (EVs). There is now an ambition to deploy a minimum of 3,600 charge points by 2032 in line with market growth.

The Council's procured EV Network Development Partner is focusing the rollout on the highway, public car parks, parks and leisure centres, working in collaboration with Transport for West Midlands. There is also development at supermarkets, retail outlets and entertainment centres. A combined public and private sector approach as part of the EV strategy adopted by the Council in November 2021, will enable future EV charge point developments to address strategic network delivery as well as prioritising more challenging areas where there is little or no off-street parking.

But it's not just about electric. The council has purchased 20 new hydrogen double decker buses as part of the Clean Air Hydrogen Bus Pilot (CAHB), aligned with the city's Clean Air Zone. The CAHB looks to 'kick-start' the hydrogen market as a viable zero-emission fuel with the procurement and deployment of the buses in Birmingham and collaboration in the development of the first commercial hydrogen re-fuelling station at Tyseley Energy Park. The buses are the world's first hydrogen fuel-cell double deck buses, and are being operated by the Council's procured operator, National Express West Midlands.

Funding is also being made available for the development of 50 EV Hackney Cabs as part of a lease scheme, offering the taxi community alternative ways to transition to electric vehicles more easily.

These activities are underpinned by the Birmingham Transport Plan 2031, which describes what the city needs to do differently to meet the demands of the future. This also includes its ambitions around walking, cycling and other modes of public transport as key modes of transportation. Existing related activities include the council bus pass scheme, whereby the council purchases an annual bus pass on behalf of staff and allows them to pay it back in monthly instalments, and the Modeshift STARS Travel Plan which includes actions and targets to promote walking, cycling and public transport to reduce car journeys.

Image: Electric charging on Colmore Row, Birmingham

Case study 4: Leading the way in tackling phosphate pollution in Herefordshire

| Rank: First | Score: 100% | ↑17% since 2021 |

Herefordshire is currently the national leader on tackling phosphate pollution and has recently developed the world's first phosphate trading platform and integrated wetland scheme to offer phosphate credits.

After lobbying Government for a Water Protection Zone for the River Lugg Special Area of Conservation, the council has recently approved the development of a new Cabinet Phosphate Commission to further support the Nutrient Management Board to protect and enhance the River Lugg and River Wye.

The council has also paved the way with the development of the nutrient budget calculator and is now progressing a pioneering natural solution to nutrient management. Integrated wetlands will address point source pollution and provide mitigation through the trading of phosphate credits, which will unlock housing development in the north of the county and improve the water quality in the river.

Essentially, what this means is that new developments must demonstrate 'nutrient neutrality' within the River Lugg catchment before they are approved. As a way to help unlock development, the council's phosphate credits scheme allows developers to purchase these as a mitigation measure to achieve the required neutrality.

Relevant areas will be filled with plants to 'suck up' the nutrients from wastewater, stopping them ending up in rivers. This is in response to rivers in the county having had excessive algae growth, often caused by high phosphate levels in the water.

Along with this novel way of reducing water pollution, Herefordshire is also mitigating air pollution. The council monitors air quality (particulates and nitrogen dioxide) using an automatic analyser at Victoria Street, Hereford. They also monitor nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) from a number of diffusion tubes located in roadside locations around the city, market towns and county. These test tube type samples enable the council to obtain monthly averages for NO_2.

The council also produces an annual air quality status report which considers all new monitoring data and assesses the data against the national Air Quality Objectives (AQO). It also considers any major changes in the county that may have an impact on air quality and reports on progress of measures to improve air quality.

Image: River Wye, Hereford (Unsplash)

Creating a cleaner environment for all generations to come

Case study 5: Enhancing nature in Solihull

| Rank: First= | Score: 91.7% | ↑8.4% since 2021 |

Solihull Council has implemented a significant number of schemes over recent years that have defined and implemented targets that focus on improving biodiversity, natural capital and tree planting.

Enhancing the natural environment is embedded as a priority in the Council Plan and, in addition, the council is working on a roadmap to deliver a Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy and delivery plan, to guide and accelerate the rollout of interventions. This includes liaison with Warwickshire County Council, recognising the cross-boundary nature and impacts of biodiversity.

Creating an environment that thrives with our presence rather than one that suffers because of it

Projects that the council has led on in recent years include:
- Arden Free Tree Scheme: an initiative whereby an individual or group can apply for funding to create hedgerows or small woodlands on their own land, within Solihull.
- Solihull's Habitat and Nature Improvements Scheme: a series of grassland, wetland, woodland and tree planting improvements which have increased and strengthened the capacity of the natural environment across the region.
- Wildlife Ways: helping Solihull's local wildlife thrive and native species survive. This includes hedgerow planting, the creation of wildflower areas, ornamental planting, green transport corridors, and other aspects such as planting up verges and parks, and revitalising wetlands, woodlands and grasslands.
- Small Habitat Grant Programme: Provision of £20,000-£200,000 grants to support smaller projects from organisations in Solihull and beyond with the aim of improving the conservation status of land.

In line with the Government's Natural Environment White Paper, the council will also encourage new and replacement tree and hedgerow planting and identify areas that may be suitable for the creation of new woodlands. Priority will be given to locations that enhance or restore the green infrastructure network and to the planting of species characteristic of the Arden Warwickshire landscape.

The council has also been integrating natural environment enhancement into its planning processes. There is now a requirement in place for developers to deliver biodiversity net gain included in Policy P10 of the current Solihull Local Plan, which has been submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination.

Biodiversity Impact Assessment calculations are already for requested for small scale developments, for example for five or fewer houses when areas of habitat such as gardens are to be lost. Biodiversity net gain and reference to the Environment Bill is included within the draft Local Plan. A concept masterplan has also been prepared for site allocations, where providing green infrastructure, enhancing ecological connectivity, biodiversity net gain and public open space are key components.

The council has also recently committed to planting 250,000 trees in the Borough by 2030.

Image: Birmingham Business Park, Solihull Parkway (Unsplash)

Case study 6: Low Carbon Business Support in Worcestershire

Rank: Second	Score: 77.8%	Same score as 2021

Worcestershire County Council's support for businesses webpage offers extensive advice and guidance to local businesses, including a dedicated section for clean growth grants to enable businesses to both access funding and upskill in low carbon and sustainability issues.

Worcestershire County Council has also been nominated as the lead authority to disseminate the Community Renewal Fund, which is a fund to help locations across the UK prepare for the Shared Prosperity Fund to be opened in 2022 to support people and communities in the UK.

Empowering the economic development of the West Midlands whilst encouraging environmental improvement

Activities taking place in the county include:
- Skills support is offered to encourage employers to influence, inform, motivate and inspire local students.
- Clean growth support is offered to enhance the low carbon economy by enabling business to get involved.
- Along with the clean growth support advertised on the website, there are also twelve additional support functions offered, including business mentoring, free accreditation schemes to support health and wellbeing and how to engage businesses with the future workforce.
- The webpage also features eight useful online tools for businesses to access. This covers business mentoring, events portals and an innovation platform.
- Worcestershire County Council also produces a business newsletter which provides information on available grants, support, upcoming events, business news, county council updates and an opportunity to hear from local businesses.
- The Worcestershire Growth Hub also has a clean growth and sustainability web page. This offers support and advice to SMEs with energy efficiency, generating onsite energy and innovations in low carbon technology.
- The Growth Hub also features case studies demonstrating the benefits of its services and support, showing how businesses can be positively impacted when using the service and, therefore, encouraging others to use it.

There is also strong evidence that the county council works closely with its district councils on this issue, as they have cited the various support programmes and local low carbon growth support as benefitting their localities too.

Worcestershire's efforts to support local businesses with both reducing their energy spend, making investment in renewable energy more viable and commercialisation of low carbon technologies is reflected in the successful delivery of two European funded programmes; the Business Energy Efficiency Programme and the Low Carbon Opportunities Programme. Regarding the former, 780 businesses have been supported with energy saving measures (as of June 2021), resulting in 18,000 tonnes of CO_2 being saved.

Image: Sustainable growth (Pixabay)

Case study 7: Healthy Malvern Hills

| Rank: First= | Score: 94.4% | Same as 2021 |

Improving health and wellbeing is a priority in Malvern Hills District Council's five-year plan. The council also has a separate Health & Wellbeing Plan covering a wide range of health issues with associated performance targets.

The plan sets out key health and well-being priorities from the past five years and focuses on:

- Mental health and well-being throughout life
- Building resilience to improve mental well-being
- Supporting those with dementia
- Being active at every age
- Increasing everyday physical activity
- Reducing harm by lowering alcohol consumption.

Level the playing-field to give everyone an equal opportunity in life

The plan is assessed on a quarterly basis and has included actions and schemes such as the Best Bar None Scheme, 'Couch to 5k' for over 50's and Balanceability, which supports younger local residents to learn the skills required to ride a bike.

Other activities taking place in Malvern Hills on health and wellbeing include:

- Malvern Hills Council has several organisations that they collaborate with to improve the health and well-being of residents, including Worcestershire County Council. There is also a county-wide website which offers information and resources across twelve different health and well-being related topics.
- The council has integrated an impact assessment process for all projects and decision making which includes inequalities, operating under the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- The council has a Connected Communities Strategy based around the ABCD (action in belonging culture and diversity) principle of equality, diversity and inclusion. This has been implemented to incorporate asset-based community development.
- The council provides activities to improve home efficiency and reduce fuel poverty by providing information and advice surgeries that give bespoke fuel bill advice, energy efficiency products advice, grant availability, training for councillors and community presentations.
- The council also supports the county-wide Warmer Worcestershire programme which promotes support and advice to residents on reducing energy bills, helping to alleviate fuel poverty.
- The council works with registered housing providers on energy efficiency projects and funding bids, including retrofit projects.
- The council also disseminates advice on the Energy Common Obligation support, which is advice specifically for lower income communities.

Image: Walkers on Malvern Hills in summer 2018 (Pixabay)

Case study 8: Utilising funding and policy in Telford to accelerate the move to clean energy

| Rank: Second= | Score: 81.0% | ↑3% since 2021 |

Telford & Wrekin Council has had great success in securing funding to accelerate its transition to clean energy in the Borough.

It was awarded over half a million pounds from the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) scheme and is the process of securing a further £2.7 million in the subsequent round, under two separate bids.

This has, in part, been born by having a close relationship with their local Midlands Net Zero Hub representative. SWM recommends that all local authorities engage with the Hub, and each LEP area has an allocated individual. Telford Council has worked closely with The Marches LEP representative and the Climate Change & Sustainability Coordinator for the council sits on the Marches Energy Strategy Steering Group.

Meeting the demand of today and tomorrow, without putting them at risk

Managing and embracing renewable energy is also embedded into planning policy, as described in the council's Local Plan: *'all development will be expected to mitigate and adapt to climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The purpose of Policy ER1 is to make sure new development is energy efficient by promoting sustainable building standards and the generation of renewable and low carbon energy.'*

Especially important in light of the current energy crisis, Telford is also working with Marches Energy Agency, and have set up the Telford Energy Advice scheme. This offers a series of grants and resources to help keep residents, particularly those at risk of fuel poverty, warm and well at home. It provides a range of free services to help residents save money on their gas and electricity bills while keeping their home warm throughout the winter.

The council has also had success implementing energy retrofit programmes on its own estate, maximising funding via the Marches LEP low carbon technology support programmes such as the Sustainable Energy in Public Buildings scheme. More complex buildings such as Telford Ice Rink have benefitted from these programmes.

Their consideration of clean energy does not stop at buildings; there is also work going on around other aspects such as street lighting. To date, 99% of Telford's streetlights are now LED, and electric vehicles are also being rolled out across the council fleet.

Image: Solar panels (Pixabay)

Case study 9: Stafford Brooks

Rank: First	Score: 85.7%	↑29% since 2021

Stafford Borough Council has recently developed a climate change adaptation plan, which is expected to be adopted in Autumn 2022. This sets out what the council needs to do to protect its services and the wider Borough from the impacts of climate change. In line with this, it is already working with partners to rollout projects that will contribute to the climate change adaptation agenda.

One of these projects is a new £4.1 million scheme which will help to alleviate flooding, create havens for wildlife to flourish and give residents in Stafford better access to their rivers and green spaces. The Stafford Brooks Project will target 25 locations alongside the rivers and streams of the town, improving habitats to enable wildlife numbers to grow and providing homes to a wider variety of species.

National Highways is funding the scheme working in partnership with Stafford Borough Council, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) and the Environment Agency. SWM strongly advocates councils working in partnership with other bodies as we recognise that they cannot do this alone, and Stafford Borough's approach to this project is commended because of this, and the multiple benefits that the project is likely to realise.

Sites that will benefit from the funding include Fairway, near the River Sow, Radford Meadows nature reserve and Doxey Marshes, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that borders the M6. The project will also encompass Marston Brook, Pearl Brook, Kingston Brook, Rising Brook and many of the habitats close to the Rivers Sow and Penk. Under the project plans, floodplains will be restored to increase their ability to store water when river and waterway levels rise. This will reduce the risk of flooding of nearby homes and businesses alleviating seasonal pressures felt across the town.

Alongside alleviating flood risk, other key objectives of the scheme are to:
- Extend, restore and create new habitats which could become home to a variety of wildlife including otter, wading birds such as lapwing and snipe and a range of amphibians.
- Create, restore and connect places for wildflowers, trees and wildlife, where the environment has been impacted by activities from previous road building.
- Create natural solutions such as new wetlands and reed beds will help filter polluted run-off from roads.
- Improve access to the town's rivers and green spaces to provide opportunities for people to connect to nature for their own health and wellbeing.

National Highways, which has been upgrading the nearby M6 between junctions 13 (Stafford) and 15 (Stoke-on-Trent), is funding the project through its Environment and Wellbeing Designated Fund. This programme, which was allocated £936m for Roads Period 2 (2020-2025), is divided into four funding streams aimed at making the biggest difference and delivering lasting benefits: environment and wellbeing, users and communities, safety and congestion and innovation and modernisation.

Recognising how our lives have and will continue to change and being proactive in tackling it

Image: Doxey Marshes, Stafford, © Tom Ellis, taken from SWM website

5 Overarching recommendations

In addition to the specific recommendations provided against each Roadmap theme in section three, the below outlines some overarching recommendations that local authorities and their supporting bodies (SWM, Environment Agency, LGA, BEIS, Defra and others) should consider, to accelerate effective action on sustainability at the local level.

Recommendations for local authorities
- Councils that are performing well in this assessment on any or all of the Roadmap themes should help other authorities with their activities by sharing good practice and celebrating their success in an honest way, to include reflections on **why** and **how** the strong performing council has achieved what it has. SWM, with its networks and communications channels, can help with this.
- County councils should provide support to the district and borough councils that they envelope. This is within their own interest to improve county-wide progress on sustainability, and it is often the case that borough and district councils have less resourcing or influence than county equivalents. Collaborative working on projects should be carried out without exception.
- Given the urgency that we need to roll out climate action, councils should also engage with other sectors (NHS, businesses, universities, communities etc.) in their locality to drive forward and scale-up local action. Cross-sector working groups are a good start to enabling these collaborations and unlocking potential private sector funding and resource.
- When developing strategies and targets, councils need to ensure these are realistic and achievable within the set timeframe. Ambitious targets are great if they can be achieved, but resourcing may prevent this.
- Councils should embed sustainability across all strategic thinking. Ultimately, delivering council strategic plans and priorities in a more sustainable way will save on resources and help to deliver priority actions more efficiently. Again, authorities who have not done this should learn from those that have.
- Linked to this, councils should provide training and upskilling opportunities to all staff around sustainability issues and identify champions who can act as leaders in other parts of the organisation. It is critical that a sustainability ethos is embedded across the whole of the council's workforce, especially in teams such as public health, planning and education.
- One simple way that can go towards achieving some of the above is to join SWM's long-standing [West Midlands Public Sector Sustainability & Energy Network](#), which contains representation from all 32 West Midlands' authorities.
- Councils should also consult resources such as the Local Government Association's [Climate Change Hub](#), their local [Net Zero Hub](#), Ashden's [Climate Action Co-Benefits Toolkit](#) and [Fit for the Future Network](#) for further support and guidance. The [Carbon Trust](#) and [Energy Saving Trust](#) can also support local authorities with engagement opportunities and advice.

Recommendations for supporting bodies
- This report shows that there is still a significant gap in progress from one authority to the next. Support should be prioritised to those authorities that have performed less well on this assessment.
- When supporting bodies are engaging with councils, they should ensure that they are doing so collaboratively. For example, if they are engaging with a county council, conversations should include the district and borough councils where activities can positively impact a larger area.
- The WMCA should ensure that they continue to engage with their constituent local authorities in order to meet the regional target to be [Net Zero by 2041](#). Based on recent engagement, there remains some

confusion around how the WMCA's plans affect non-constituent and neighbouring authorities (e.g. Staffordshire and Warwickshire). Further clarity on this by the WMCA is required.

- Local authorities need to be provided with opportunities to engage, connect and share good practice. A mixture of virtual and in-person events should be convened on different topics to enable this to happen, to allow poorer performing councils to learn from others to improve. SWM is in the strongest position to do this, as we are demonstrating with our event on adaptation in November 2022.
- More transparent signposting of funding opportunities should be distributed amongst all local authorities as soon as they are open for applications. The funders and dissemination bodies have a responsibility to target as wide a range of authorities as possible, and not just the 'usual suspects.' Alongside this, partners such as BEIS or LGA should provide a 'one-stop-shop' of nationally available funding opportunities that local authorities can apply for.
- Further funding should be provided to local authorities from central Government via LEPs and the WMCA to enable them to fund action on more challenging issues, such as decarbonisation of heat and climate adaptation.
- Regarding the latter, performance on climate change adaptation related activity remains the poorest when compared to other areas. Given the crucial role councils can play in helping to make their local areas more resilient to climate change impacts, further support is urgently needed. The publication of the third National Adaptation Programme in 2023 provides an opportunity to clarify what this could look like.
- Standard guidance should be provided on effective methods that local authorities can apply to establish a sustainability strategy. A consistent approach along with templates and guides would help to accelerate such action in those authorities with fewer resources.
- Case studies and examples of good practice should be widely shared digitally across platforms that are frequently engaged with by councils (with one of the best examples being the LGA Knowledge Hub).
- Supporting bodies should help to scale-up and rollout successful projects on a bigger scale to accelerate climate action over a wider area.

-END-