





Report information

Title: West Midlands Local Authority Sustainability Benchmark 2023, Summary Report

Version: Final, November 2023

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With thanks to all local authorities that responded to the benchmarking request.

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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 <u>members</u> 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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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 <u>West Midlands Sustainability Roadmap to 2030</u>. 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) and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) 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 only 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, 20 out of 32, rank against each SWM's Sustainability Roadmap to 2030 themes.

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

	2023		2022		2021	
Roadmap symbol	Average % score	Rank	Average % score	Rank	Average % score	Rank
$\Delta $	72.5	1	67.5	2	52.9	2
4	71.7	2	63.5	4	50.0	3
CO2	69.7	3	67.7	1	49.2	4
Various	66.0	4	60.7	6	46.5	7
	63.2	5	61.7	5	56.0	1
	62.4	6	56.1	7	46.8	6
≋\	61.6	7	65.5	3	48.4	5
(A)	59.7	8	52.6	8	44.2	8
	50.9	9	51.2	9	40.3	9
Olarian Landau Angel	50.6	10	43.8	10	33.1	10

^{&#}x27;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 ('CO₂') and metrics that can affect many or all Roadmap themes ('Various').

3.1 Carbon emissions (co.



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

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. There remains a reasonably high level of confidence that councils are on track to meet these targets.
- Local authorities are progressing reasonably well with implementing carbon reduction plans.
- Local authorities are making steady progress with the decarbonisation of buildings, but there remains a lot more that could be done.

Specific CO₂ recommendations for local authorities

- Utilise the <u>SCATTER tool</u> or equivalent 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 <u>Midlands Net Zero Hub</u> representative.
- Apply for the <u>Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme</u> and/or other <u>Salix funding</u> to provide resource for rapid decarbonisation of internal building stock.
- Set up a local Climate Commission to bring about collaboration with key local actors (public and private sector) to work together to drive forward Net Zero aims and ambitions.

3.2 Resource efficiency



Progress rank: Sixth out of 10 Roadmap themes (+1 place compared to 2022)

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
- 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 eight 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
 findings of the Government consultation on consistency in household and business recycling in England
 were published in October 2023. The intention of the new regulations introduced by the Environment
 Act 2021 is to drive up our recycling rates across England. Under the new requirements:
 - All local authorities in England must collect the same recyclable waste streams for recycling or composting from households. The recyclable waste streams include paper and card, plastic, glass, metal, food waste, and garden waste.
 - All non-household municipal premises in England (such as businesses, schools and hospitals), must make arrangements to have the same set of recyclable waste streams (with the exception of garden waste) collected for recycling or composting, and must present their waste in accordance with the arrangements.
 - Through statutory guidance, the Government are proposing requiring local authorities to collect residual (non-recyclable) waste at least fortnightly, if not more frequently. This proposal is subject to consultation with local authorities and will be confirmed in the statutory guidance.
 - Municipal food waste collections will reduce the amount of food waste going to landfill, where it releases harmful greenhouse gases, helping to achieve the <u>Net Zero Strategy</u> target to eliminate biodegradable waste sent to landfill from 2028.
 - The <u>Resources and Waste Strategy for England</u> 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.
- Use the Local Government Association (LGA) <u>Waste Routemap</u> to help identify interventions that could
 embed sustainability in council services with a focus on waste, complementing existing council projects
 and actions. It enables you to reflect on your work in this area and how things could be improved. Good
 practice case studies are included.
- Sign up to updates from the <u>LGA Sustainability Hub</u> which includes focus on waste management in council services.
- 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 <u>detailed research into this approach</u> 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 2022)

Summary of findings

- Fairly slow progress has been made with the implementation of sustainable travel plans or associated targets to reduce car usage, though there has been steady improvement over the last two years.
- Incentives for staff to use public and active transport more often continue to increase.
- Low emission vehicle uptake, especially within council fleets, is still quite high, possibly accelerated by
 the priorities of the Midlands Net Zero Hub and the Government's national electric vehicle target.
 However, progress has not improved over the last two years, which suggests uptake in low emission
 vehicles is slower than it needs to be.
- Public and active transport community schemes and incentives have seen a marked increase.

Specific Clean and Active Travel recommendations

- Apply to the Government's <u>electric vehicle charging infrastructure programme</u> to accelerate rollout of a cleaner fleet and to help other local companies do the same.
- 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: Seventh out of 10 Roadmap themes (-4 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, though progress has more or less halted. 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 <u>Birmingham Clean Air Zone</u> 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: Second out of 10 Roadmap themes (+2 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 (BNG/ENG) compared to last year, perhaps due to the Environment Act 2021 starting to come into force this year and the imminent (January 2024) implementation of BNG.

Specific Natural Environment recommendations

- Engage with local community groups, Environment Agency and your local <u>Wildlife Trust</u> 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 <u>Natural Environment Plan</u> and align their activities with those outlined here.
- All authorities are required to produce a <u>Local Nature Recovery Strategy</u>, which provides an opportunity
 to prioritise the enhancement of biodiversity in each area, linking with improvements to climate
 resilience. Integrating within this should be a commitment to embrace <u>Biodiversity Net Gain</u> and
 embedding this principle into new developments.

• 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 has effectively halted, in terms of both embedding
 the concept of sustainability in local economic growth, and business support. Targets for boosting the
 low carbon and environmental goods and services sector have reversed since last year.
- 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 slowest to act on this theme have been District and Borough (lower-tier) authorities, 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 since 2021. This may be due to the various uncertainties
 around the future of LEPs, risking the stalling of action in this area. However, it seems that many
 councils are looking to leverage the Shared Prosperity Fund to accelerate low carbon growth.

Specific Sustainable Growth recommendations

- Your local authority can signpost businesses across your area to the <u>West Midlands Net Zero Business</u>
 <u>Pledge</u> to ensure commitments to supporting private sector carbon reduction and business
 opportunities are made. This is available to 17 local authorities across the West Midlands.
- 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 the above partners to ensure appropriate post-EU funding (e.g. Shared Prosperity Funding) is
 utilised and includes elements related to sustainability and low carbon. Use SWM's <u>funding pages</u> to
 keep an eye on other opportunities.
- Signpost SWM and the Environment Agency's publication <u>Weathering the Storm</u>, aimed at improving the resilience of businesses and, in turn, allowing them to grow.
- Work closely with your local <u>Green Business Club</u> 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 <u>Innovative Zero Carbon Working Group</u>.

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: First out of 10 Roadmap themes (+1 places compared to 2022)

Summary of findings

- Encouragingly, activity to level up health inequalities is progressing reasonably well, especially around providing support to homes on tackling fuel poverty.
- Most councils have put equality, diversity and inclusion policies in place.
- 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.
- Councils have also shown to be taking measures to combat the rising cost of living.

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 and cost of
 living 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, <u>using</u>
 <u>Government data</u>.
- 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.
- Encourage employees to act as champions in specific aspects of health and wellbeing, such as becoming <u>Mental Health First Aiders</u>.

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 (no change compared to last year)

Summary of findings

- Local authorities' performance on decarbonising and saving energy use remains strong.
- 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.
- Progress in setting up community energy projects and partly owned local energy companies has generally slowed down, though this varies across the region.
- 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.
- Preparation for energy price rises is still relatively low across the region, a concern in light of the forthcoming winter of 2023/24.

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 <u>Midlands Net Zero Hub</u> representative (there are six in the West Midlands, one for each LEP area) 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.
- Maintain a network of 'trusted gatekeepers' for engaging with local residents and businesses about energy; these are unlikely to be primarily energy focused organisations.
- Work with local government education departments and local education and skills providers to strategically support the development of the necessary skills for sustainable energy use (including retrofit).

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

- Despite setbacks in areas like clean air and water and sustainable growth, adaptation remains the area 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 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 <u>West Midlands Climate Change Adaptation Plan</u> 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.

- In 2022, SWM <u>published this document</u> that sets out a compendium of case studies showing practical adaptation actions led by local authorities; it includes partners they worked with, funding sources and outcomes. This should be consulted by all councils to identify what good looks like and to catalyse ideas.
- The latest <u>National Adaptation Programme</u>, published by Government every five years, was released in July 2023. This outlines a series of initiatives that councils can get involved in with regards to adaptation, and conveys the latest suite of actions that local councils ca3n take or contribute to. All councils should be familiar with this document.
- SWM has a support offer for councils on climate adaptation; we can help develop your work in this area.

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: Fourth out of 10 themes (+2 compared to 2022)

Strongest performing areas (>70% score)

- All 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 vast 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; the score for this metric has risen sharply from 49% to 70% in two years.
- Likewise, the majority of local authorities now lead or contribute to a district or county-wide Working Group, where cross-sector partners come together to work collaboratively to drive forward decarbonisation and implementation of sustainability-related actions.
- 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 70% from 46% in 2021.

Weakest performing areas (<60% 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.
- There has been a decline this year in the number of authorities that have won sustainability-related awards. We have no clear evidence of this, but we suspect that this may be down to councils not applying for awards in the first place, rather than not winning. It is hugely beneficial for councils to gain recognition for any good work it does on this agenda, to boost reputation, share good practice and lead by example.
- Progress on supporting schools with regards to sustainability and decarbonisation is slower when
 compared to corporate buildings. While some councils are not directly responsible for schools, either
 due to their being a district or borough, or because an increasing number of schools are converting to
 academy status, it is still important to assist with the decarbonisation and sustainability of schools,
 especially when councils have set a county-wide Net Zero target. A combination of energy audit
 programmes and behaviour change initiatives will help to improve school sustainability on a large scale
 within a specific geography.

4 Case studies

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

Case study 1: Destination Zero in Malvern Hills

Rank: First= Score: 90.0% ↑3% since 2022

"To lead Malvern Hills District to become carbon neutral as quickly as possible and by 2050 at the latest, with at least a 50% reduction in the district's carbon footprint by 2030." This is the ambition of Malvern Hills' 'Destination Zero' action plan published in 2020. The council has recently published an Annual Report that details its progress and actions towards meeting these goals.



Destination Zero, supported by a £250K council reserve, identifies eight priority areas for action on emissions reduction; these include energy efficiency, low carbon transport, reducing waste and carbon sequestration through habitat restoration. Each priority contains a range of individual actions that will contribute to meeting them.



Key progress on delivering actions against the plan in recent years has included projects such as:

- Implemented energy efficiency improvements to Malvern theatres after successfully bidding for £147K from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.
- Launched the Destination Zero crowdfunding programme, an £100k fund to help community organisations reduce carbon emissions, tackle climate change and improve the natural environment.
- Employed a new Biodiversity Project Officer to implement biodiversity and habitat improvement projects that compliment Destination Zero objectives.
- Started the implementation of the refurbishment of the council's public toilets to include solar roof tiles and battery storage as well as more efficient LED lighting and water saving measures.
- Provided £100K funding to the Malvern Hills Car Club to set up satellite car clubs around the district, establish an online booking system and upgrade three vehicles to electric.
- Provided £28K funding to the Malvern Hills Car Club to start the E-bike to Work hire scheme.
- Introduced a license fee waiver to remove fees for those registering fully electric taxis.
- Continued to support and provide £150K funding to the Ticket to Ride crowdfunding programme that help community-led transport projects encourage more active forms of travel and cut carbon emissions.
- Delivered £111K worth of renewable energy installations at 30 properties in the district through funding received through Phase One of the Green Homes Grant Local Delivery Scheme. This consisted of installing solar PV panels at 21 properties and solar thermal at nine properties.
- £545K of government funding was successfully bid for through phase 2 of the Green Homes Grant Local Delivery Scheme. This funding is being used to support households by upgrading the energy efficiency of their properties through measures such as installing solar panels and draught proofing.

Image: Malvern Hills (Pixabay)

Case study 2: Dudley's efforts to reduce waste and enhancing ethical purchasing

Rank: Third Score: 94.4% ↑44% since 2022

Dudley Council is making efforts to reduce waste that it produces as an authority and a borough, that unwanted items can be re-used and that any new goods and services that are procured are done so in as sustainable a way as possible.

Waste targets and policies

The council has targets in place for waste recycling and composting, which are set at 42% for 2023/24, 48% for 2024/25 and 50% for 2025/26, emphasising the commitment to drive down unsustainable approaches to disposal. These targets have led to the establishment of policies in place for



waste management, recycling, composting, re-use and waste minimisation.

Reduce and re-use

The council has a strong relationship with charity Provision House. Working in partnership they have <u>established a 'pop-up tip'</u> where residents can go along and donate unwanted items to prevent them being disposed of, including soft furniture and domestic goods like kettles, toasters, microwaves, lamps, power tools and toys.



Other items include green waste, wood, scrap metal, small electrical items, residual waste, bricks, rubble, plasterboard, household waste, general recycling, mattresses and furniture. Provision House then donates these items as appropriate to people who have faced difficulties like domestic violence, poverty, homelessness and modern slavery.

The council is also integrating advice on how to reduce food waste <u>within its webpages</u> designed to support people on the poverty line. This includes guidance on how to keep food fresh for longer, and how to cook healthy, nutritious meals without wasting too much.

Sustainable procurement

Regarding <u>purchasing of new goods and services</u>, Dudley Council's policy guidance uses the TOMs matrix for delivering sustainable and ethical procurement. It has established a social value policy, ensuring that all tenders are assessed against the priority outcomes of the Council's Plan, which are shown in the image above. A minimum of 10% and up to a maximum of 20% of the total mark will be applied towards Social Value for any newly procured service, meaning commissioned projects are now likely to be required to consider sustainability outcomes throughout.

Image: <u>Suppliers Guidance</u> © Dudley Council

Case study 3: Birmingham's Zero Emission Vehicle Revolution

Rank: Third= | Score: 76.2% | **↑4.8%** 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 <u>Birmingham Transport Plan 2031</u>, 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% ±0% since 2022

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.

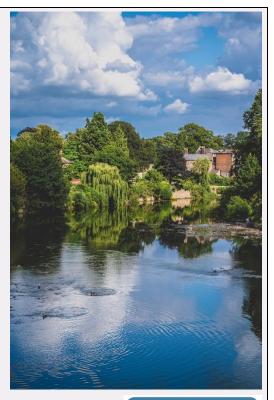
After lobbying Government for a Water Protection Zone for the River Lugg Special Area of Conservation, the council has recently approved the development of a new Cabinet Phosphate Commission to further support the Nutrient Management Board to protect and enhance the River Lugg and River Wye.

The council has also paved the way with the development of the <u>nutrient budget calculator</u> and is now progressing a pioneering natural solution to nutrient management.

<u>Integrated wetlands</u> 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 (NO₂) 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 NO₂.

The council also produces an annual air quality <u>status report</u> 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)

Case study 5: Enhancing nature in Solihull

Rank: Third

Score: 91.7%

±0% since 2022

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 <u>Council Plan</u> 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.

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.
- <u>Solihull's Habitat and Nature Improvements Scheme</u>: a series of grassland, wetland, woodland and tree planting improvements which have increased and strengthened the capacity of the natural environment across the region.
- <u>Wildlife Ways</u>: 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.
- <u>Small Habitat Grant Programme</u>: 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: Staffordshire Business Environment Network

Rank: Twelfth= Score: 44.4% ↑24% since 2022

The <u>Staffordshire Business Environment Network</u> (sben) has been in operation for over thirty years, having been established in 1992.

It provides support to businesses, in particular SMEs, across the county with regards to improving their energy efficiency, reducing carbon emissions, better waste management and embracement of the circular

economy, economic and climate resilience and electrification of transport.

Staffordshire County Council act as the Network's secretariat, providing long-term support to help nurture sustainable growth across the county. Many of the district councils, and Stoke-on-Trent City Council, also signpost businesses in their areas to the Network.

Their mission statement is: "To support organisations to achieve long term sustainability and maximise their business opportunities through innovative environmental activity."





sben run numerous programmes aimed to help businesses grow while becoming more sustainable; in recent years, these have included:

- The Environmental Sustainability GROWTHmapper tool, a comprehensive business diagnostic tool
 containing a set of business assessment questions designed to underpin coaching and advice to
 Staffordshire businesses.
- The Low Carbon Business Evolution Programme; advice, guidance and diagnostics designed to help businesses across the area reduce their carbon footprint and increase energy efficiency.
- Carbon Tracker, a free tool to help businesses across the county improve their energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions.
- Free carbon literacy training, to help businesses reduce costs and carbon.

sben also runs a series of good practice events and workshops throughout the year on a range of topics, all of which are aimed to supporting business growth and efficiency. They also signpost funding, courses, accreditation opportunities and other resources through its communications channels and newsletter.

The Network's longevity is the primary key to its success; the team and its brand have built a hugely positive and established relationships over this time, and that's why its membership base continues to grow. The county council's continued support of sben means it is in safe and reliable hands when it comes to its role in supporting business growth across the county.

Image: sben's recent Annual Networking Event © sben

Case study 7: Prioritising health and wellbeing in Worcestershire

Rank: Sixth= Score: 85.7% ↑30% since 2022

Worcestershire County Council recognises the importance of improving the health and wellbeing of the county's residents, evidenced by a range of projects and activities aimed at reducing the health inequality gap, supporting residents with the cost of living and reducing fuel poverty.

Health inequalities

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) continues to set out challenges in health and wellbeing and provides a call to action to reduce health inequalities. This has since led to the development of Worcestershire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy which provides a framework for addressing health inequalities across the county. This embedment into key strategies is an excellent starting point and shows the council's commitment to dealing with these challenging issues. Given recent pressures on households through the cost of living crisis, the council has responded to this by providing a detailed webpage on how residents can gain support during these challenging times, including signposting to several resources that are publicly available.





Fuel poverty

The council is also delivering on its commitments outlined above, especially when it comes to tackling fuel poverty. Ambitions and projects that have just concluded or are still in operation include the following:

- It has set a target, in line with the national target, to ensure as many homes as reasonably practicable are brought up to an EPC rating C by 2030.
- The council has also established a target within the energy strategy to support around 2,000 fuel poor homes per year, through a combination of a variety of forms of support, including financial support and provision of information, advice and guidance.
- The long-running <u>Warmer Worcestershire Programme</u> remains in operation; this sees the council working with Act On Energy to coordinate home energy advice and encourages the installation of energy efficiency measures and renewables where appropriate to improve household thermal comfort and reduce costs and carbon. Part of the Programme is the <u>Household Support Fund</u>, which provides help to those most in need, including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and people with disabilities who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills.
- The council is also running the second phase of the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) programme, which provides retrofitting to homes with low EPC ratings in deprived areas; this round aims to help 368 homes in the Redditch, Bromsgrove, Wychavon and Malvern areas by 2025.
- The <u>Warmth on Prescription programme</u> worked with the primary care networks and social prescribing teams. WCC underwent a successful pilot in partnership with other local councils and it is now being rolled out to the rest of county. It provides £50,000 per district aimed at those with health conditions made worse by living in a cold home.

Image: Home insulation (Unsplash)

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

Rank: Second

Score: 91.7%

↑13% since 2022

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.

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 <u>Marches Energy Agency</u>, 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: Adapting Warwickshire to Climate Change

Rank: Second= Score: 66.7% ↑24% since 2022

Warwickshire County Council is building momentum on climate change adaptation. The council recognises that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is unlikely to be enough to prevent the changes in climate that are already locked-in from having an impact on the county's services, infrastructure, people, businesses and natural environment.



Its response has been a considered and action-orientated approach to adapting to these changes, which started in 2019 when the council convened an adaptation task and finish group. This used the evidence from a series of workshops with officers to produce a report which identified work already being done as well as several risks and possible adaptation responses.

As a result of this report, Cabinet agreed the need to produce an <u>impact</u> <u>assessment</u> for Warwickshire and to require that the impact of projected climate changes be used in assessing capital investment options. This then led to a



Climate Impacts Assessment for Warwickshire, which looked at how the county had been affected by extreme weather in the past, and the impacts this had, and looked at future climate scenarios and how this could change the extent of the impact in future. It looked at both the impact on the council's services and the impact on the county's residents.

This then led to a more <u>in-depth analysis</u> aimed at improving the resilience of key services that are deemed to be particularly vulnerable to climate change, these being flood risk management, the Fire and Rescue Service and public health. Each of these services now has detailed current and future climate vulnerabilities and have prioritised these risks. Each of these are associated with a raft of adaptation options, which are largely changes in operational process.

Following on from this, in 2023 the council commissioned the publication of a <u>Climate Change Adaptation</u> Plan for the whole county. The work comprised of three main phases:

- A hazard and climate change analysis which identified the historic key impacts and projected these forward based on modelled climate changes. It focused on primary impacts such as flooding, drought, temperature and wind.
- Development of primary impacts to form a detailed risk assessment across the natural environment, infrastructure, people, the built environment, business and industry.
- The final phase was the development of a climate change adaptation framework to provide the council with a plan for acting on these risks and improving resilience. This is based on four action themes and is linked to the risk assessment.

The next step for the council will be implementation of the action plan and embedment into corporate services, along with ensuring they engage with partners, including the district and borough councils in which they envelope.

Image: Stratford-upon-Avon (Pixabay)

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, DESNZ, 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 <u>West</u>
 <u>Midlands Public Sector Sustainability & Energy Network</u>, which contains representation from all 32 West
 Midlands' authorities.
- Councils should also consult resources such as the Local Government Association's <u>Climate Change</u>
 <u>Hub</u>, their local <u>Net Zero Hub</u>, Ashden's <u>Climate Action Co-Benefits Toolkit</u> and <u>Fit for the Future</u>
 <u>Network</u> for further support and guidance. The <u>Carbon Trust</u> and <u>Energy Saving Trust</u> 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 (highest scoring authority scores 91%, the lowest scores 35%, with even greater variations in scores against specific Roadmap themes). 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 and work with their constituent local authorities in order to meet the regional target to be <u>Net Zero by 2041</u>.
- 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 have demonstrated via the running of numerous council-focused events over
 the past 21 years.
- 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 DESNZ or the 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. SWM is in a strong
 position to support councils with this owing to our existing work, relationships and resources produced
 as part of our collaboration with the Environment Agency.
- 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-