

# **West Midlands Local Authority Benchmark 2016**

**Addressing climate change mitigation, adaptation  
and the low carbon economy**

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**WEST MIDLANDS**  
COMBINED AUTHORITY

## Report information

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### **About Sustainability West Midlands**

We are the sustainability adviser for the leaders of the West Midlands. We are also the regional sustainability champion body for the West Midlands, designated by government. We are a not-for-profit company that works with our members in the business, public and voluntary sectors. Our Board is private sector led and has cross-sector representation; they are supported by our team of staff and associates.

Our vision is that by 2020 businesses and communities are thriving in a West Midlands that is environmentally sustainable and socially just.

Our role is to act as a catalyst for change through our advice to leaders, to develop practical solutions with our members and share success through our communications.

[www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk](http://www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk)  
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## Executive Summary

Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) delivered the Local Authority Low Carbon Economy Programme on behalf of Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands (IEWM) between 2010 and 2014. As part of this programme, SWM has developed and used a good practice benchmarking framework, which allows local authorities to assess their progress and performance in addressing climate change and the low carbon economy. This methodology has been replicated for the 2016 round of reporting for the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), who will use the information obtained to feed into their Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and to identify good practice at a local scale, that can be supported and scaled up across the WMCA area.

The benchmark was circulated to all 32 local authorities within the West Midlands region. In 2016 the number of completed benchmarks returned to SWM was 14. For each criterion assessed, local authorities were asked to select a score between 0 and 3, where 0 indicates 'No Progress', 1 indicates 'Getting Started', 2 demonstrates 'Good Practice' and 3 is an indication of 'Leading Practice.' Taking account of the scores reported for each question, an average score was calculated for each metric in 2016. The results are as follows:

- Overall: 1.59
- Mitigation: 1.92
- Low carbon economy: 1.56
- Adaptation: 1.20

This indicates that most local authorities feel that overall they are somewhere between 'getting started' and 'good practice' with regard to actions to address climate change.

Activity related to all metrics is reported to have increased between 2014 and 2016. This is encouraging, particularly when considering the impact of budget cuts on local authority focus and activity on climate change. It may also be related to the increased need for local authorities to focus on their local economies; indeed the low carbon economy metric has seen the greatest improvement. Other possible factors are discussed in the main report.

In all responses to the benchmark, excellent examples of progress in addressing climate change are provided. These activities must be built upon and grown in order to sustain progress in relation to climate change mitigation, adaptation and promotion of a low carbon economy and to embed it within the culture of the local authority.

SWM is currently undertaking many projects aimed at supporting local authorities with sustainability and development of the low carbon economy. This includes this annual benchmarking along with the various public sector networks coordinated by SWM and the offer of tailored support. The benchmark results highlight the need for SWM to continue in this role. SWM will also continue to provide support regarding sustainability and the development of the low carbon economy to the LEPs within the West Midlands in the development of their future submissions for EU funding.

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## 1 Objective

Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) delivered the Local Authority Low Carbon Economy Programme on behalf of Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands (IEWM) between 2010 and 2014. As part of this programme, SWM has developed and used a good practice benchmarking framework which allows local authorities to assess their progress and performance in addressing climate change and the low carbon economy. This methodology has been replicated for the 2016 round of reporting and overall is the sixth time that we have undertaken this exercise with a pilot in early 2010, a baseline in late 2010 and progress reviews in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

This year, we have secured funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to update the benchmark for the seven local authorities that make up the WMCA; an accompanying report has been produced that goes into a greater detail for each of these local authorities, following interviews SWM conducted with Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and the City of Wolverhampton Council. We have also utilised this funding to give all 32 local authorities in the West Midlands the opportunity to update their benchmark.

The objective of the benchmark is to allow local authorities to demonstrate annual progress in addressing climate change against an independent framework. It allows sustainability champions to identify priorities for future improvement. This in turn allows SWM to lever in and prioritise the support required by local authorities with regard to climate change and growing the low carbon economy in the short-term future. It is also a means of highlighting good practice that is shared between authorities both locally and nationally.

The information provided is used to feed into the evidence base for the WMCA in the development of their Strategic Economic Plan and also to the six West Midlands Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The information also helps SWM to identify and lever in extra external funding for direct support programmes for groups of authorities. To date this has amounted to over £1 million of direct funding with an additional £3.2 million achieved in annual energy saving programmes. We also signposted to another £300 million worth of funding accessible annually.

We are the only region in the UK to carry out this form of annual monitoring and good practice sharing, helping to raise the profile of the West Midlands for external investors.

## 2 Methodology

Using established contacts, the benchmark was circulated to all local authorities within the West Midlands for completion. Where a local authority had completed the benchmark on a prior occasion their previous response was included so that this could be built upon and to save the local authority time.

The framework was structured according to three core areas; climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation and promotion and stimulation of a low carbon economy.

For each criterion local authorities were asked to select a score between 0 and 3 where:

0. indicates 'No Progress'
1. indicates 'Getting Started'
2. indicates 'Good Practice'
3. indicates 'Leading Practice'

There was space for additional comments and if the local authority had given a high score they were asked to provide supporting evidence.

Following issue of the benchmark, SWM sent several emails reminding local authorities of the benefits of completing the benchmark and also of the required date for responses. When completed benchmarks were received by SWM, the results were input into a master spreadsheet to allow comparison with previous years and with different local authorities.

In 2013, SWM provided individual reports for each local authority reflecting four years of benchmarking as well as research. The reports included findings and recommendations on how to improve the level of activity relating to climate change mitigation, adaptation and development of the low carbon economy. In 2016, similar to 2014, we are providing another snapshot of progress for the West Midlands as a region. A more detailed report will provide additional guidance related to the constituent authorities of the WMCA.

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Completion rate

The benchmark was circulated to all 32 local authorities within the West Midlands region. The number of completed benchmarks returned to SWM was 14. This was slightly higher than in 2014, on a par with 2013 but lower than in previous years, as shown in Figure 1.

Year	Completed benchmarks
2010	27
2012	17
2013	14
2014	12
2016	14

Figure 1: Annual response rate

Authorities providing a response in 2016 were:

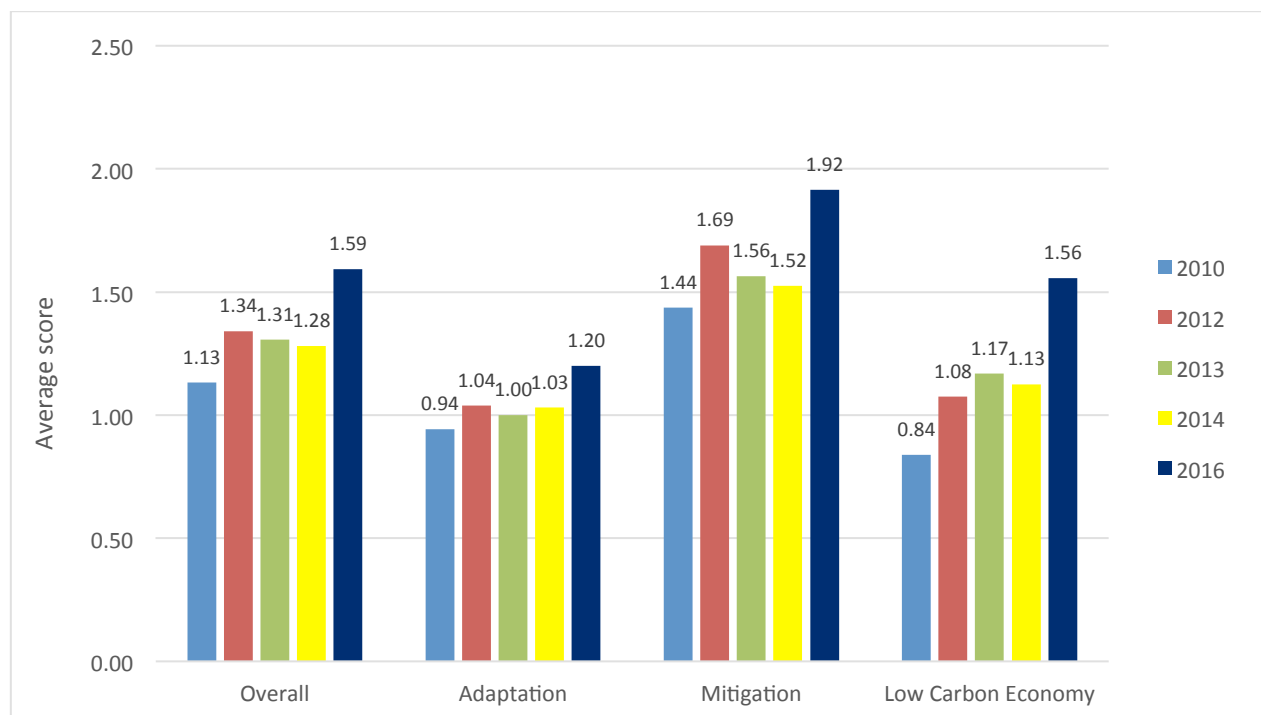
- Birmingham City Council
- Bromsgrove and Redditch Council
- City of Wolverhampton Council
- Coventry City Council
- Herefordshire Council
- Lichfield District Council
- Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council
- Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- Stafford Borough Council
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- Worcestershire County Council
- Wyre Forest District Council

Given that local authorities are under considerable pressure to deliver services with financial constraints and limited resources, we consider this to be a reasonable response rate. In total, 44% of all authorities provided a response; of these, six were district (lower tier) councils and eight were county (upper tier) councils or unitary authorities.

### 3.2 Average score

Taking account of the scores reported for each question, an average score was calculated for each year of reporting. The results are shown in Figure 2.

	2010	2012	2013	2014	2016	Change	
						2014-2016	2010-2016
<b>Overall</b>	1.13	1.34	1.31	1.28	<b>1.59</b>	+0.31	+0.46
<b>Adaptation</b>	0.94	1.04	1.00	1.03	<b>1.20</b>	+0.17	+0.26
<b>Mitigation</b>	1.44	1.69	1.56	1.52	<b>1.92</b>	+0.39	+0.48
<b>Low Carbon Economy</b>	0.84	1.08	1.17	1.13	<b>1.56</b>	+0.43	+0.72



**Figure 2: Average scores**

This indicates that most local authorities feel that overall they are somewhere between ‘getting started’ and ‘good practice’ with regard to actions to address climate change.

Activity related to all metrics is reported to have risen quite significantly between 2014 and 2016, by 24%. Promisingly, each metric has obtained its highest score in 2016 when compared to every other year of reporting. Overall, progress since 2010 is even better, with an overall increase of 41% within those six years.

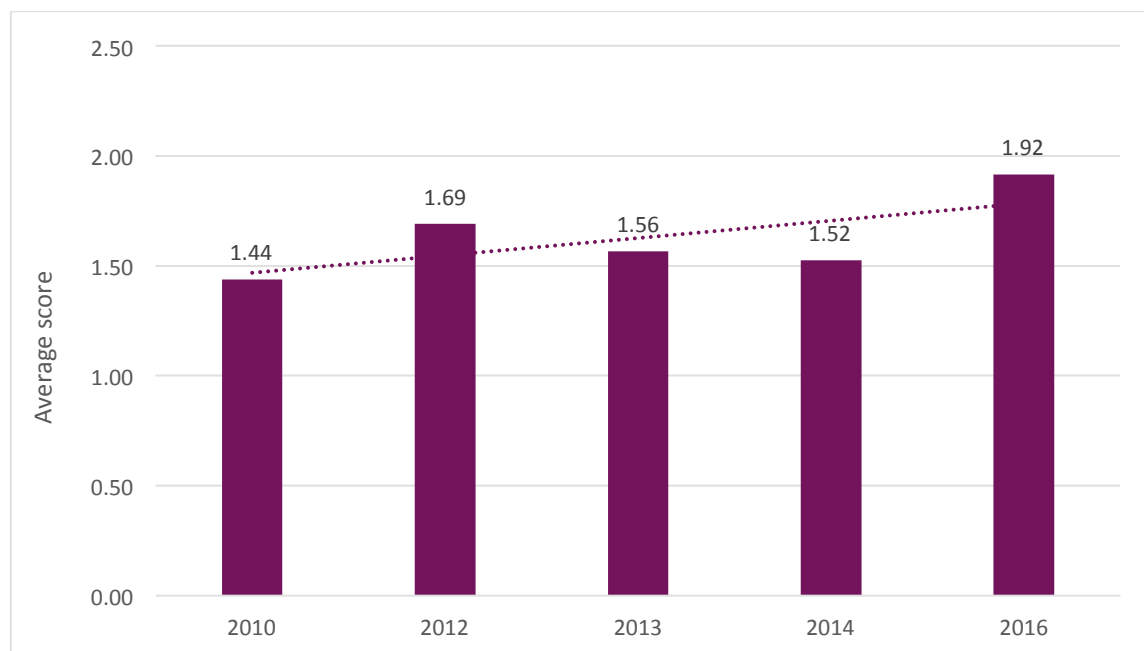
Overall, individual authorities report some excellent examples of measures to address climate change and these are highlighted later in the report.



The results shown in Figure 2 reflect feedback from 44% of the local authorities in the West Midlands. SWM appreciates that those local authorities that submitted their benchmark in 2016 may have greater resource and capacity to do so, and therefore may have the resource to develop greater quality projects related to climate change. This may be another explanation for the relatively high average scores compared to previous years. We understand that some local authorities in the region have lost members of their sustainability / climate change teams in the past few years, or have no coordinated team at all, and it is these authorities that may not have been able to submit a benchmark return, either due to lack of time or knowledge on what has been implemented. These are the authorities that will need the greatest support from SWM, the WMCA and others.

### 3.3 Climate change mitigation

Mitigation	2010	2012	2013	2014	2016	Change	
	1.44	1.69	1.56	1.52	1.92	2014-2016	2010-2016
						+0.39	+0.48



**Figure 3: Average mitigation scores**

Average scores in 2016 for mitigation are 1.92 in comparison to 1.56 for the low carbon economy and 1.20 for adaptation. This indicates that local authority activity is highest in the area of mitigation in comparison to adaptation and the low carbon economy, consistent with previous years.

Theme of each question	Average score					Change	
	2010	2012	2013	2014	2016	14-16	10-16
Senior Level Commitment	2.11	2.24	1.86	1.58	2.29	+0.70	+0.17
Corporate Strategy and responsibility	1.52	1.71	1.57	1.75	2.07	+0.32	+0.55
Service delivery	1.33	1.59	1.50	1.58	1.71	+0.13	+0.38
Planning policy	1.44	1.53	1.64	1.58	2.00	+0.42	+0.56
Low carbon planning advice	1.11	1.29	1.29	1.33	1.79	+0.45	+0.67
Carbon management understanding and approach	1.63	2.35	2.00	1.92	1.93	+0.01	+0.30
Carbon monitoring/footprint	1.59	1.88	1.71	1.75	1.79	+0.04	+0.19
Carbon management plan and reduction target	1.48	2.06	1.79	1.67	1.86	+0.19	+0.38
Carbon reduction achieved	0.72	0.88	0.93	1.17	1.14	-0.02	+0.42
Financing renewables		1.59	1.64	1.67	2.07	+0.40	+0.48
Awareness and behavioural change	1.59	1.47	1.43	1.17	1.71	+0.55	+0.12
Links to LSP (2010)/LEP (2012 onwards)	1.22	0.65	0.57	0.75	2.71	+1.96	+1.49
Links to LNP			0.36	0.58	1.07	+0.49	+0.71
Support to local businesses and other organisations	1.41	1.35	1.57	1.67	2.00	+0.33	+0.59
Support to residents and community groups	2.11	2.06	2.07	1.92	2.50	+0.58	+0.39
Support for schools		1.35	1.57	1.67	1.57	-0.10	+0.22
Community footprint (former NI 186)	0.78	1.18	1.21	0.92	1.29	+0.37	+0.51

**Figure 4: Trends in answers to mitigation questions**

Figure 4 shows the theme of each mitigation related question and the average scores given per year for each. In 2016, the three highest scoring answers where consistently good to leading practice is being demonstrated were in relation to senior level commitment (2.29), links to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) (2.71) and supporting residents and community groups (2.50). Possible reasons for these being particularly high scores are as follows:

- Senior level commitment: There is an increasing need to encourage buy-in at the senior level as justifications of staff roles may be required in times of cuts. It is also appreciated that the authorities that have submitted a benchmark overall are likely to have greater buy-in and a team in place to achieve good results.
- Links to LEPs: Building a strong, positive relationship with their LEP can put local authorities at the forefront of opportunities generated from the low carbon strand of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), one of the key sources of funding related to low carbon activity in 2016.
- Supporting residents and communities: Local authority cuts are resulting in a greater need for communities to be self-sufficient. Communities generating their own clean energy is also increasingly popular and cost-effective and it is likely that local authority sustainability colleagues are responsible for kick-starting these programmes.

The 'link to LEPs' question has also experienced the biggest rise between years, both since 2010 when Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) preceded LEPs and since 2014 when the last benchmark exercise took place. Overall, scores against all questions have increased since

2010 and all but two have increased since 2014. The exceptions are related to actual carbon reductions achieved and support for schools. The latter could be indicative of local authorities increasingly relinquishing control of their local schools as they become academies.

The two lowest scores in 2016 for mitigation are in relation to actual carbon reductions achieved and developing links with Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs). Regarding the former, many variables contribute towards an authority’s carbon footprint, much of which is outside of their control. Changes in reporting technique can also account for this. It is, however, a little surprising that greater carbon reductions have not been achieved given the good work that is going on as suggested by the scores against the other mitigation questions.

Links to LNPs are not very well established across the piece; this may be due to an uncertainty around LNP focus in relation to climate change, or challenging geographical boundaries of LNPs, which do not always align with LEPs or local authorities themselves.

However, given that the average score for mitigation activities is 1.92, it indicates that authorities consider their understanding of carbon management to be good and have an active approach to assisting their communities and residents to improve energy efficiency in the home.

### 3.4 Promotion and stimulation of a low carbon economy

	2010	2012	2013	2014	2016	Change	
						2014-2016	2010-2016
<b>Low Carbon Economy</b>	0.84	1.08	1.17	1.13	1.56	+0.43	+0.72

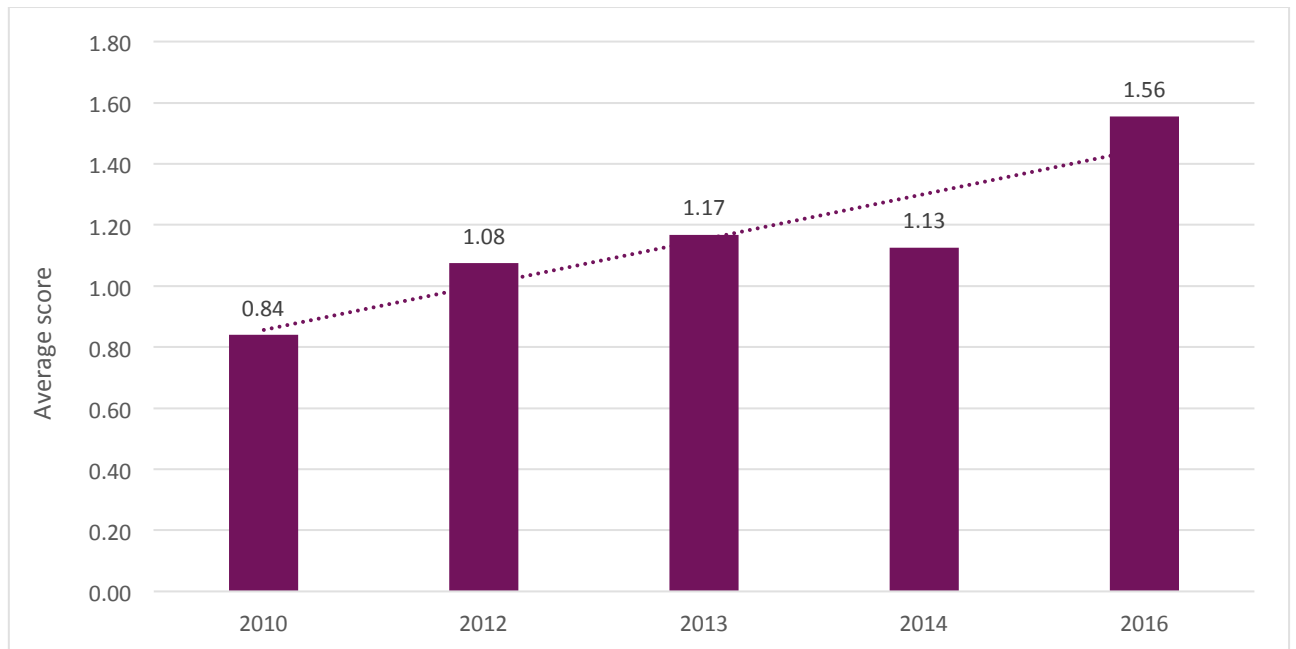


Figure 5: Average low carbon economy scores

Average scores in 2016 for promotion and stimulation of a low carbon economy are 1.56, significantly higher than in other years. The gap in progress between low carbon economy and adaptation, which used to score similarly in previous years, is now wider, with greater progress being made in this metric.

Theme of each question	Average score					Change	
	2010	2012	2013	2014	2016	14-16	10-16
Corporate plans and service delivery	0.74	1.00	1.21	1.25	1.50	+0.25	+0.76
Local development framework	0.52	0.94	0.86	0.75	1.43	+0.68	+0.91
Economic and development strategy and plan	0.67	0.82	1.07	1.00	1.21	+0.21	+0.55
Procurement	1.11	1.06	1.43	1.33	1.36	+0.02	+0.25
Influencing local consumption	1.33	1.12	1.29	1.00	1.86	+0.86	+0.52
Links to LSP (2010)/LEP (2012 onwards)	1.07	0.94	1.21	1.08	2.79	+1.70	+1.71
Links to LNP			0.29	0.42	0.71	+0.30	+0.43
Stimulating a low carbon economy - skills	0.59	0.94	1.36	1.00	1.21	+0.21	+0.62
Stimulating a low carbon economy - business	0.67	1.06	1.36	1.27	1.36	+0.08	+0.69

**Figure 6: Trends in answers to low carbon economy questions**

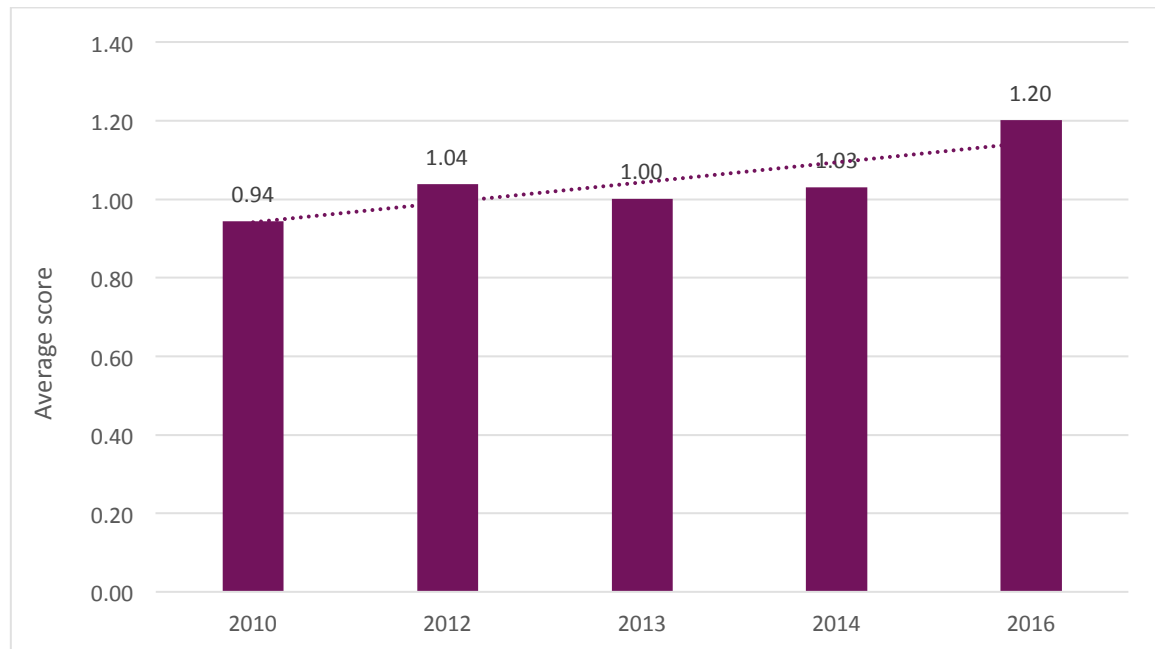
Figure 6 shows the theme of each low carbon economy related question and the average scores given per year for each. In 2016, by far the highest scoring answer was around building the links with LEPs (see mitigation).

The second and third highest related to influencing local consumption (1.86) and corporate plans and service delivery (1.50). In terms of influencing local consumption, this refers to “active engagement with residents, business, retailers, schools and community groups about how they can make positive changes in their purchasing behaviour and consumption.” The high score may have been brought about due to an increase in local authorities focusing on local economic growth and working with the LEPs, as well as a need for local self-sufficiency as outlined in section 3.3.

Promisingly, all low carbon economy questions have seen an increase in scores between 2016 and both 2010 and 2014, although there is still room for improvement particularly in terms of establishing good links with LNPs (0.71), developing an economic strategy and plan (1.21) and stimulating the skill required for a local low carbon economy (1.21), which scored the lowest.

### 3.6 Climate change adaptation

Adaptation	2010	2012	2013	2014	2016	Change	
	0.94	1.04	1.00	1.03	1.20	2014-2016	2010-2016
						+0.17	+0.26



**Figure 7: Average adaptation scores**

Average scores in 2016 for adaptation are 1.20 in comparison to 1.03 in 2014. Whilst this shows a modest increase compared to all previous years, adaptation still, as in previous years, scores the lowest compared to low carbon metrics. An average score of 1.20 suggests that most local authorities are still only ‘getting started’ on adaptation, despite many years of support and guidance from national bodies and increasing extreme weather events, particularly flooding.

Theme of each question	Average score					Change	
	2010	2012	2013	2014	2016	14-16	10-16
Corporate Strategy and responsibility	1.37	0.94	0.93	1.17	1.43	+0.26	+0.06
Service delivery	1.04	1.41	1.07	1.00	1.21	+0.21	+0.18
Planning policy	0.93	1.29	1.21	1.33	1.64	+0.31	+0.72
Understanding risks and opportunities from a changing climate	1.30	1.38	1.29	1.50	1.29	-0.21	-0.01
Adaptation strategy and action plan	1.11	1.18	1.36	1.42	1.29	-0.13	+0.17
Implementation	0.81	1.35	1.14	1.08	1.21	+0.13	+0.40
Communication	0.93	0.88	0.79	0.67	1.00	+0.33	+0.07
Links to LSP (2010)/LEP (2012 onwards)	1.00	0.35	0.21	0.33	1.86	+1.52	+0.86
Links to LNP			0.14	0.33	0.71	+0.38	+0.57
Support to local businesses and other organisations	0.37	0.59	0.79	0.75	0.71	-0.04	+0.34
Support to residents and community groups	0.52	0.65	1.00	1.17	0.71	-0.45	+0.20

**Figure 8: Trends in answers to adaptation questions**

Figure 8 shows the theme of each adaptation related question and the average scores given per year for each. Consistent with the other metrics, the question that shows the highest score and the greatest rise since 2014 is around engagement with LEPs. Although there is not a requirement for LEPs to spend money on adaptation, many still recognise climate risks, particularly from flooding, in their Strategic Economic Plans. This is as well as being able to align green infrastructure, a key component in building climate adaptations, to other more common ERDF priorities.

Planning policy and adaptation (1.64) is also relatively high in 2016, possibly reflecting a greater requirement on councils to ensure that flood risk is considered across all planning decisions, as well as the statutory role of top tier authorities as Lead Local Flood Authorities.

Most other questions see a modest increase in score since 2010 and 2014, albeit still scoring low overall. Of most concern are the questions related to ‘understanding risks and opportunities from a changing climate’ and ‘support to residents and community groups,’ which have both seen a decline since 2014 and in the case of the former, since 2010. It is worrying that, on this evidence, most local authorities do not understand the risks climate change pose on them any more now than they did six years ago, despite national Government publications (such as the National Adaptation Programme) and frequent extreme weather events.

The decline in support to community groups is surprising, as well as a concern. This goes against the trend in the low carbon metrics, which shows support to community groups increasing. There is a discord here between the two, as when local authorities work with their local communities, there is an opportunity to implement climate resilient interventions as well as projects that focus on reducing carbon. The evidence presented here suggests that this is not happening, which given a reduction in overall council service provision to communities is worrying.

Overall, adaptation scores consistently less than low carbon metrics largely due to (1) the lack of statutory obligations in place that mean local authorities have to take action, compared to mitigation (e.g. the Carbon Reduction Commitment); and (2) the business case for adapting is significantly more difficult to demonstrate to senior managers and members than mitigating, projects around which usually generate money saving opportunities instantly.

There are publications and there is support available to local authorities to help them adapt to climate change; see sections five and six of this report.

In the following section, we have identified many areas of good practice, which are to be commended despite increasing cuts to local authority budgets and staff from the 2016 benchmark review. Three examples of good practice are provided from across the region, one relating to each metric.

## 4 Good Practice Examples

### 4.1 Climate change mitigation



**Herefordshire  
Council**

Herefordshire Council is demonstrating excellent progress on climate mitigation, scoring the highest out of all submitting authorities in 2016 (2.71) against this metric. Key to this is a core team of staff delivering outcomes within their Carbon Management Plan 2011-2015,<sup>1</sup> which was signed off at the most senior level. A refresh of this Plan, to commence in 2016 up to 2020, is to be signed off this year.

Herefordshire Council has also implemented an ambitious target of reducing its carbon footprint by 40% by 2020, from a 2008/9 baseline; around a 25% reduction has been realised to date. The council's senior staff recognise the benefit of implementing these targets as it allows the team to develop projects such as a LED street lighting programme, estimated to save £17 million over 20 years.<sup>2</sup> The business case is being demonstrated and led from the top. The council is also investing in monitoring systems to ensure that its carbon emissions can be measured accurately.

Other examples of projects include:

- A pre-feasibility study for a district heat network in Hereford city centre.
- A solar PV programme<sup>3</sup> that by the end of 2016 could generate 793,000 kWh per annum at its peak. This alone will avoid approximately 366 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e per annum.
- A £2.1 million budget for renewable energy and a 0% interest loan to schools to enable renewable energy projects on their sites. There is 450kWp of renewable energy installed on schools generating approximately 382,000 kWh and saving 176 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e annually.
- In terms of behaviour change, a special environmental awareness session was introduced as part of the staff CPD and new staff programme, an initiative that the Chief Executive is very active in supporting.
- The development of Herefordshire Business Futures Forum,<sup>4</sup> which provides advice to local businesses on climate change issues, as well as the impending launch of a cross-boundary capital grants scheme for energy efficiency measures.
- A three-year service level agreement with Marches Energy Agency to deliver an Affordable Warmth programme of advice and funding support to residents,<sup>5</sup> and sustainability festivals and events in partnership with the New Leaf charity.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, and most impressively, when compared to progress elsewhere, is that the authority has a strong association with their LNP, including a formally adopted joint CO<sub>2</sub> reduction target.

<sup>1</sup> <http://bit.ly/1NCUxEB>

<sup>2</sup> <http://bit.ly/245L4DZ>

<sup>3</sup> <http://bit.ly/1pJYliG>

<sup>4</sup> <http://bit.ly/1N2Pggb>

<sup>5</sup> <http://bit.ly/26xaclT>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.herefordshirenewleaf.org.uk/>

## 4.2 Promotion and stimulation of a low carbon economy

# CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

City of Wolverhampton Council has demonstrated good progress in stimulating its low carbon economy, from scoring 0.50 in 2012 to 2.11 in 2016. This is reflected in the council's Economic Growth Plan, which recognises support for sustainability and the low carbon economy as a key cross cutting theme to deliver a green economy and achieve sustainable economic growth.

The council has also demonstrated that it is taking the lead locally on low carbon economic issues, by coordinating the Black Country LEP's Green Growth Group, driving forward how European funding related to low carbon issues will be spent in the area.

This Group is developing a Green Growth Plan,<sup>7</sup> being reviewed as a Smart City Strategy and containing a project pipeline. This process is overseen by the LEP Board, which is represented by a low carbon champion. This Group will further support low carbon ERDF bids, especially in relation to the energy sector, and is also particularly keen to focus on energy demand from businesses across the region, with a view to implementing a series of low carbon options.

There is also a commitment to ensure that the council incorporates low carbon projects into its planning system. Examples of this include the implementation of policies around sustainable transport, renewable energy, heat networks and so on in the Black Country Core Strategy<sup>8</sup> and Area Action Plans.

In terms of influencing local consumption, City of Wolverhampton Council has put together information for residents on energy efficiency as part of an ongoing programme to tackle fuel poverty and deliver affordable warmth.<sup>9</sup> There is also a project in the pipeline that will develop support for businesses on energy efficiency, in partnership with other authorities and funded by European money. This, again, is a key component of the LEPs Strategic Economic Plan and Green Growth Plan, showing how a local authority and LEP can work together to generate stronger and more effective results.



The council has also worked with its local LNP to try and ensure that its priorities are also integrated into relevant low carbon and economic growth strategies.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.blackcountrylep.co.uk/place/green-growth-plan>

<sup>8</sup> <http://blackcountrycorestrategy.dudley.gov.uk/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://bit.ly/1UjnxJx>



### 4.3 Climate change adaptation



Solihull Council has demonstrated consistently good progress on climate adaptation (1.82), relative to the West Midlands average (1.20). Its commitment is initially evident by the inclusion of a key objective around climate adaptation into their overarching Sustainability Strategy,<sup>10</sup> as well as showing the economic benefits of adapting via the newly adopted Green Prospectus<sup>11</sup> and addressing the health impacts of climate change into the council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This shows that adaptation is seen as a cross-departmental issue, which is hugely important when attempting to successfully address climate change impacts.

Cross-sector working is further emphasised by the establishment of an officer group with representation from Flood Risk, Public Health, Biodiversity and other teams to encourage collaborative activity, share best practice and to help audit their activity against the National Adaptation Programme. This has allowed climate change risks to be embedded into the council's overall Corporate Risk Policy.

Other projects that the council is focusing on in relation to adaptation include the following:

- **Planning:** The Local Plan contains a policy on climate change which states that, “developers should ensure resilience to the impacts of a changing climate for the anticipated lifespan of the development through consideration of a range of adaptation measures, including the location, design, materials, build, operation of developments and the provision of green infrastructure.” Sustainable Urban Drainage systems are also required by an additional policy.
- **Schools:** Smith's Wood Community School and Light Hall School have a combination of rainwater harvesting, greywater recycling and natural ventilation measures implemented.
- **Communications:** The Council's website contains information on flood risk management and other climate risks and includes links to key national bodies who can provide more support.<sup>12</sup>
- **Economy:** The LEP is looking to integrate green infrastructure into its local economic strategies, in part to provide cooling and to improve business resilience.
- **Business support:** Solihull's Sustainability Visioning Group<sup>13</sup> has incorporated adaptation into their Action Plan to ensure local businesses can receive advice on how become more resilient.
- **Mapping:** The council is working on a GIS mapping exercise, which will plot features such as green infrastructure, heat island effects, health inequalities and other metrics to better inform planning decisions and development.
- **Health:** The Council's Seasonal Excess Winter Deaths group oversees promotion and implementation of the Cold Weather and the Heatwave Plans for England.

Solihull Council has certainly taken the initiative with climate adaptation and understands the importance of the issue as demonstrated by the activities outlined above.

<sup>10</sup> <http://bit.ly/21iNGZY>

<sup>11</sup> <http://bit.ly/1QExpGX>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/flood>

<sup>13</sup> <http://bit.ly/1YW5MiM>

## 5 Moving towards good and leading practice

SWM believes that there are standard and simple ways that local authorities can approach climate change mitigation, adaptation and promotion of the low carbon economy to ensure that these areas receive commitment at the highest level; are embedded into culture and way of working; and continue to achieve results. This will be increasingly important as further budget cuts take effect on local authority operations. We are aware that in many local authorities, sustainability is now integrated into the remit of wider teams as opposed to having dedicated sustainability managers and officers. For this reason it is essential that these principles are embedded throughout the organisation and considered as 'business as usual.'

### 5.1 Climate change mitigation

A commitment to carbon management and reduction should be expressed at a senior level, including a commitment to enable year on year reductions in line with Government targets and a desire to ensure carbon management is embedded in the council's culture and approach. Where possible, targets should be set at both organisational level, so that internal processes and their impact can be monitored, as well as at LEP / LNP level, working with other local authorities and organisations to drive down emissions on a larger scale. The latter approach will also help to open up more opportunities for European funding related to ERDF monies and others, and provide greater attraction to regional investors.

There should be a clearly defined strategy for carbon reduction, again at both an organisational and LEP / LNP level, based on a robust evidence base of assessments, which will enable progress, reporting, compliance and success with the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC), which is in force until 2017. Carbon value at stake should also be calculated, estimating the amount of money that could be saved should carbon reduction targets be achieved.

To achieve the above, a carbon management and reduction plan should be in place for at least the next five years with evidence based targets, costed and prioritised opportunities for reduction and a clear implementation plan including roles, responsibilities and measures. A detailed carbon footprint should be regularly calculated and suitable for interrogation.

From an organisational perspective, carbon management should be identified as a priority embedded within corporate strategies and relevant corporate plans. There should be an understanding of what this means across all functions and efficiencies and cost savings are recognised. Mitigation should be a priority consideration within the delivery across all key service areas. Clear policies and site-specific targets should be developed where possible for design standards and different low carbon technologies, linked to regional and national targets. Supplementary guidance with low carbon design assistance should be provided more systematically by the council's team.

Innovation should be taken in developing staff engagement and training. This should include active participatory approaches to target setting, delivery of opportunities and measurement and reporting of success.

Detailed advice should be available to all local business and other organisations in relation to carbon mitigation; good examples of this are already taking place as part of the various Green Business Clubs operating from local authorities across the region.

## **5.2 Promotion and stimulation of a low carbon economy**

All councils are moving more towards supporting their local economies, therefore embedded opportunities and consideration of the low carbon economy should be included in all council plans and decision-making. The promotion of the low carbon economy should be seen as priority by executives with an identified cabinet member and/or reporting committee to champion the agenda.

Making reference to national targets and the Local Development Framework (LDF) should make clear commitments and contain stretching targets and future plans for the development of a low carbon economy.

There should be a strategy and action plan in place which clearly identifies low carbon economy opportunities and requirements relating to key sectors of the local economy and how this relates to the council's individual departments, services, plans, operations and partnerships. This would benefit from being embedded within the publication of a low carbon plan that covers the council's operations and/or the LEP/LNP area.

There should be active engagement with residents, business, retailers, schools and community groups about how they can make positive changes in their purchasing behaviour and consumption. Analysis of local business and social enterprises should be undertaken to identify those able to provide low carbon goods and services, if the LEP has not already done so via its European Structural Investment Fund Strategies 2014-2020.

As this suggests, there is a central role for the council in the development of partnerships with the LEP, LNP, local organisations and businesses to facilitate a low carbon economy. The council should have an ongoing approach to identify the gaps and actions required for skills, training, specific funding and partnerships to help achieve a low carbon economy and carbon reduction targets.

## **5.3 Climate change adaptation**

Adaptation should be identified as a priority within corporate strategies and relevant corporate plans, with impacts and response of key service delivery areas included. A nominated cabinet member should be responsible for adaptation with identified lines of responsibility to service delivery officers.

Adaptation must be a priority consideration within the delivery across all service areas and a key issue within planning policy and associated decision-making. Risks and opportunities for current and future scenarios should be prioritised for council services, partners and community stakeholders, to prevent future extreme weather events from negatively affecting service delivery and resulting in costs.

An adaptation plan should be developed to cover all risks, opportunities and responses based on a local climate impact assessment. Implementation of actions should then be ongoing and proactive across all services and sectors. Monitoring mechanisms provide evidence of impacts and value of delivered schemes. Detailed information should be communicated both internally and externally about drivers, strategies, targets, reduction plans and achievements.

The LEP should move to include consideration of the impacts and opportunities associated with climate change adaptation in their planning and the development of an adaptation plan and local strategy. Preparing for a changing climate makes good business sense and experience of severe weather events in the West Midlands has shown serious consequences for business operations for premises and staff, disrupting suppliers and distribution networks and causing inconvenience to customers. It is important that LEPs consider the impacts that climate and weather related vulnerabilities and opportunities may have on the delivery of its objectives. This should lead on to the development of an adaptation strategy and local action plan.

Residents and community groups should have a central role in identification of adaptation risks and opportunities and the local authority should work with them and partners to help improve their resilience. Moreover, local authority sustainability officers should work with flood risk teams – a mandatory top-tier council function – civil contingencies officers and emergency planners to instil a greater resilience into both local authority operations and the wider communities in which they serve.

#### **5.4 Overall**

It is likely that with increasing budget cuts and limited resources many local authorities will continue to struggle to prioritise activity focused at addressing climate change when faced with more pressing and regulated targets. However, in all responses to the benchmark the local authorities have demonstrated good examples of progress in addressing climate change. These activities must be built upon and grown in order to sustain progress in relation to climate change mitigation, adaptation and promotion of a low carbon economy and to embed it within the culture of the local authority.

Many authorities report that strategies and action plans include consideration of climate change but that these have not been reviewed to include the most up-to-date information relating to potential impacts on the local authority. For example, some authorities report that a climate adaptation plan has been undertaken but then not used to inform policy and procedures. Where tasks remain unfinished or incomplete, these should be addressed by the local authority as a priority.

## 6 Further support

Along with this benchmarking, SWM is in a strong position to help local authorities to further develop their work on sustainability and the low carbon economy. The following provides a brief overview of this support.

### 6.1 Networks

SWM coordinates various sector-based networks which local authorities can join for free:

- [Public Sector Sustainability and Energy Network](#)
- [Green Business Clubs Network](#)
- [Low Carbon LEP Leadership Network](#)
- [Sustainability and Public Health Network](#)
- [Climate Resilience Network](#)
- [Innovative Low Carbon Working Group \(with Birmingham Science City\)](#)

This benchmark highlights the need for SWM to continue in this role and to ensure relevant events are run to which local authorities can attend.

### 6.2 LEPs

SWM will continue to provide support regarding sustainability and the development of the low carbon economy to the LEPs within the West Midlands in the development of their future rounds of submissions for EU funding and in the longer term through cross-LEP opportunities. We have already commenced this process by working closely with both Black Country and Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEPs and by analysing the climate change commitments of all 39 LEPs nationally, the first analysis of its kind.

### 6.3 Our expertise

SWM has significant expertise that could help local authorities improve their benchmark scores and progress with sustainability projects. Ways in which SWM can help local authorities include:

- Independent appraisal of an existing climate change adaptation or low carbon strategy and suggestions for improvements.
- Development of a new climate change adaptation plan or risk assessment.
- Development of a new carbon reduction strategy and action plan.
- Engagement programme with council employees from different departments or council members to raise awareness of the agenda and embed it across the organisation.
- Energy audits to help identify potential cost and carbon savings.

- Community engagement programmes to help local authorities reach into local communities to improve their resilience or identify the implementation of environmental projects.

#### 6.4 Useful resources

- [Fit for the Future: Local Enterprise Partnerships' Climate Ready and Low Carbon Economy Good Practice report](#)
- [Local Enterprise Partnerships Resilient Growth Information Note](#)
- [Severe Weather Impacts Monitoring System](#)
- [Climate Just](#)
- [Local Authority Business Case for Adaptation report](#)
- [The Future We Made: Birmingham and West Midlands Future Proofing Toolkit 2020-2060](#)

*The full benchmark assessment criteria are available upon request. For this and any other queries relating to this report, please contact [enquiries@swm.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@swm.org.uk).*

**END**