



REGEN

Acknowledgements

About Net Zero Living

Net Zero Living is a programme of work run by Innovate UK. The programme provides support to local authorities, their partners and communities to overcome non-technical systemic barriers to the scaling and adoption of net zero solutions.

Within the programme, there are 52 local authorities, the Net Zero Living participants, at various stages in the development and delivery of their local net zero plans.

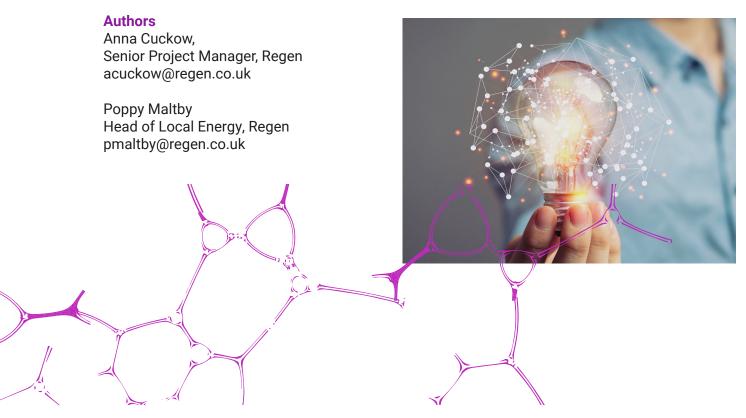
About Regen

Regen provides evidence-led insight and advice to transform the UK's energy system for a net zero future. We know that a transformation of this scale will require engaging the whole of society in a just transition. We have 20 years' experience in transforming the energy system for net zero and delivering expert advice and market insight.

About the Carbon Trust

The Carbon Trust, a consultancy committed to accelerating the transition to a decarbonised future, has pioneered positive climate action for over 20 years. It partners with governments, public bodies, leading businesses and financial institutions to drive progress towards net zero. Its global team of more than 400 environmental sustainability experts, including engineers and specialists in finance and policy, collaborates with diverse organisations, industries and business sectors worldwide. Recognising the critical importance of transition planning and collaboration across public and private sectors in achieving net zero, the Carbon Trust places this focus at the core of its work. To date, its experts have supported over 3,000 organisations and cities across five continents in their journey towards net zero.

If you have any questions or feedback about this document, please contact the authors.



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Background



Throughout the Innovate UK-funded Net Zero Living programme, Regen and Carbon Trust have examined the role of net zero and energy planning in delivering successful projects.

Our objective has been to learn from the programme, and some wider projects, to improve the way that planning and delivery are undertaken.

This research builds on the report 'Maximising the value of local net zero planning'. This introduced the 'Enable, Embed, Enact' framework to put more focus on local authority roles to steer more effective planning and delivery processes.

This report also found that the key value of net zero planning approaches was often how the process itself has helped to 'embed' outcomes. The process has helped local authorities understand the net zero challenge, create support across their organisations and wider stakeholders for the required pace and scale of local changes, and to critically deploy resources to accelerate progress.

Figure 1: The Enable, Embed, Enact framework for net zero planning

Enable



The role of the authority is primarily as an enabler (e.g. through supportive policy) and a convener. Delivery is external.

Embed



Responsibility and accountability rests with existing authority functions.

Enact



The local authority takes responsibility for developing detailed plans and has some deployment reponsibility.

Authority risk and resource requirement

The Net Zero Living programme has also clearly illustrated that how well net zero is 'embedded' in organisations has been a critical factor in the successful delivery of local authorities' projects.

Rather than seeing climate in isolation and competing with delivering statutory duties, successful projects had strong governance and senior level support, and helped demonstrate the wider benefits of climate action, for example, to economic growth and health.

However, embedding consideration of climate change into decision-making is an ongoing and lengthy process for many local authorities.

To learn lessons from the programme, this report has examined the approaches taken by a selection of local authorities and looked at how climate is reflected in local economic, transport, health and wellbeing strategies. Strategies are one indicator of how, and how well, net zero is embedded across a local authority. We also draw out insights from interviews with local authorities who are part of the Net Zero Living programme around their different approaches to enabling cross-functional collaboration

In this report, we have used terms such as net zero, climate action, decarbonisation, climate mitigation and carbon emissions, relatively loosely and sometimes as a shorthand for complex considerations. We acknowledge that each has a specific definition, but this reflects the varied use of language across local authorities and policy areas, as well as the wide scope of this thought piece.

The information and recommendations from this report are anticipated to be useful to both policy makers with an interest in accelerating action and delivery of net zero at a local level, as well as local authorities looking to embed climate into their organisations, particularly those undertaking net zero planning processes.



Summary of findings

Through Innovate UK's Net Zero Living programme and beyond, local areas have made significant progress in planning for net zero and delivering climate action.

This research has demonstrated the variety of approaches taken by local areas to embed net zero into activities across local government functions. To do this, many areas have been increasing the emphasis on the wider local benefits of accelerated climate action, from reducing fuel poverty, boosting jobs and skills, to improving health, strengthening critical infrastructure and more.

Our review of a selection of local economic, transport, and health and wellbeing strategies indicated that all recognised the importance of climate action. However, they varied considerably in how well integrated climate was in each strategy and how they framed the benefits and challenges.

Although it is important that local strategies reflect local needs, priorities, and politics, the differences in approach and capacity across local authorities regarding net zero and climate are considerable.

As a result, there is a danger that areas may get left behind without more clarity from central government on local roles and responsibilities in this space.

Interviews:

Variability in approaches but also in capacity

From interviews held with officers, it became clear that there are many different approaches to embedding net zero across local authorities. These include making the wider outcomes of climate action the driving force of collaborative working with crossfunctional teams. Some places are actively positioning climate as a strategic priority while others have focused on upskilling colleagues and improving decision-making processes and governance. Often, different approaches are combined or employed at different stages to help teams move from identifying opportunities to delivering and then sustaining action.

The interviews also highlighted significant variability between councils in the maturity of these approaches and their capacity to drive these processes.

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Strategies:

Climate features in all strategies but integration is not comprehensive

Strategies are an important indicator of how well embedded net zero is within councils. We found that all recognised climate as a key issue for their areas. While we focused primarily on strategies produced by Net Zero Living Demonstrators, who are likely to be among those authorities furthest ahead in their net zero journeys, this is a significant finding in itself.

However, the strategies varied considerably in how they framed net zero. They placed varying emphasis on the opportunities presented by the transition, such as green jobs, compared to the challenges, such as extreme weather and resource constraints. Some strategies embed net zero more comprehensively and consistently than others. For example, some missed opportunities to highlight the wider outcomes of climate action or narrowly focused on reducing organisational emissions.

Notably, many areas struggled to acknowledge issues related to hard-to-decarbonise sectors, such as emissions from agriculture or aviation, or articulate the extent of change required.

While strategies should reflect local needs and priorities, some inconsistencies may be attributed to gaps in UK and devolved government guidance. While further research would be needed to draw a conclusive link, the Welsh Wellbeing Goals and Scottish Government guidance² on mainstreaming climate considerations into all decision-making may encourage local authorities to produce more holistic strategies.



Without more clarity from central government on local roles and responsibilities, there is a risk that some places are left behind, given the considerable differences in their capacity to embed net zero.





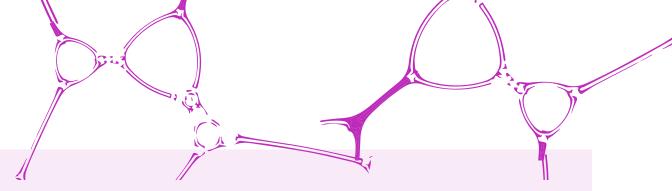


For this research, we reviewed strategies produced by: •

- Bristol City Council
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
- · Cardiff Capital Region
- · Cardiff Public Services Board
- · City of York Council

- · Dorset Council
- Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership
- · Leicestershire Council
- · Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
- London Borough of Newham
- Manchester City Council
- · Oxfordshire County Council.

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Opportunities:

There are several opportunities to further clarify the roles and responsibilities of local authorities in relation to climate and net zero.

In England, devolution and local government reorganisation mean that over the next few years, many new local authorities will be refocusing their organisational priorities and refreshing numerous strategies and governance processes, presenting an opportunity to better embed climate responsibilities and goals.

The development of Local Growth Plans by Mayoral Strategic Authorities and the National Wealth Fund's Regional Project Accelerator will also help create the right conditions for climate action to become better embedded as part of regional and national efforts to boost growth.

This could be achieved through:

1. Evolving net zero planning processes

A 'bottom up' approach would be to place a more explicit focus in local net zero planning processes on embedding climate into local decision making and service delivery. With the development of Regional Energy Strategic Planning (RESP) by the National Energy System Operator (NESO), it will be important to consider how processes, such as Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs), could evolve. They could focus more on ensuring that clear outcomes are achieved in terms of embedding climate action and recognising the wider benefits, including across statutory functions, such as planning, housing, transport and health.

2. Providing better guidance and resources

Further consistency and clarity of approach across local authorities could also be encouraged through more 'top down' guidance for local areas. This includes guidance from across government on the roles and responsibilities of local authorities on climate action in general, and clearer direction from different departments aligned with existing statutory responsibilities, such as health and transport.

3. Considering statutory responsibilities

The Local Government Association (LGA) now state that local authorities in England need statutory duties and powers, sufficient funding and robust support to lead on climate action. With the devolution agenda, there is an opportunity to introduce a statutory responsibility on climate, either at unitary or combined authority level.³

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Interviews: Approaches to embedding net zero

Delivering net zero is highly challenging and embedding climate action across council services and activities is part of the solution.

It can help achieve, at pace, the system-wide decarbonisation needed while helping councils tackle their greatest challenges more efficiently and effectively.

This section of the report has been produced from interviews with council officers as well as feedback from stakeholders representing and supporting local authorities. Topics covered included the role of climate teams, involvement in strategy development and recommendations for change. Some contributions have been anonymised.

The experience of Net Zero Living participants highlights how places are responding to this challenge and seeking to embed net zero in various ways, depending on their responsibilities, local priorities, and resources. Different approaches can also be combined to identify opportunities, turn strategies into delivery and sustain action.

The challenge

Ambition is high, but progress is slow



Since 2019, over 300 councils have declared a climate emergency and set ambitious targets for net zero, often ahead of the UK's 2050 target. Many local authorities subsequently developed a climate strategy or action plan. Some have made significant strides towards decarbonisation, yet there is concern that these strategies are not translating into swift or comprehensive action across many councils, due to technological, funding and political complexities.

Climate Emergency UK found that most UK councils are only taking half of the actions they consider necessary to mitigate and adapt to climate change, with slow progress observed over the last two years. The LGA also recognises the need for accelerated progress.⁴

Aligning priorities is necessary to maximise the carbon emission reductions possible through the many 'spheres of influence' that councils have. According to the Climate Change Committee, local government influences emissions from buildings, surface transport and waste which account for around half of the reductions needed between 2038 and 2042, indicating the importance of action by councils to achieving net zero nationally.⁵

Some councils struggle to articulate why they should take action to decarbonise and adapt to climate change given competing priorities, many of which are statutory duties and functions.

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Approach 1

Making the wider outcomes of climate action the driving force



Experience from the Net Zero Living programme highlights that climate action enables wide positive change for local areas, rather than being a cost or pressure on resources. But the term 'net zero' and language around carbon emission reduction targets are often difficult to communicate internally within local authorities as well as to local communities.

Councils involved in the Net Zero Living programme have found that articulating the benefits of net zero (such as clean air, warmer homes, healthier families, local jobs and thriving high streets) is key to embedding climate into the objectives of other departments. Increasing the visibility of these connections at an early stage can help strengthen the case for investment into projects that are aligned with net zero.

For example, in a project funded by Net Zero Living, Cardiff City Council developed a data-led investment case for large-scale home retrofit. The modelling from this project highlighted that the scheme could deliver up to £35 million per year in NHS savings from improved indoor conditions and reduced cold-related illnesses, as well as create up to 4,480 jobs and save 777,000 tonnes of carbon emission over 20 years.⁷

Tangible measurable benefits of recent net zero interventions uncovered by UK100⁸ include 7,500 avoided hospital visits due to Birmingham's Clean Air Zone and a 25% reduction in bills for social tenants from a district heat network in Leeds.

Case study— Leicestershire Collaborate to Accelerate Net Zero (CAN)

In Leicestershire, a flagship project is embedding climate action while delivering wider benefits.

Project background and partnerships

Funded by Innovate UK's Net Zero Living Programme (NZL), the Leicestershire CAN project⁹ brings together public and private sector partners to deliver a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP), build community energy capacity and explore collaborative working arrangements.

Partners include two Leicestershire universities, Energy Systems Catapult, community energy organisations and National Grid Electricity Distribution. The partnership enables the exchange of expertise and facilitates collaborative action, which extends across council team structures, geographical boundaries and political parties.

From partnerships to delivery

The team has worked to strengthen links between local authority teams across Leicestershire councils. For example, to increase interest in the emerging energy plans, they worked with Regen (one of the programme's technical assistance partners) to deliver workshops with city, county and district planners exploring how energy planning could benefit the planning system. Another NZL programme partner, City Science, also delivered a workshop on funding and delivery models for energy solutions, improving understanding of innovative approaches.

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This workshop also informed the project's approach to governance and collaborative working, with The University Partnership now taking on a convening role to deliver the sustainable energy solutions identified by the LAEPs and secure investment.

To maximise the benefits of the project, the team ensured that the project design, planning, and outputs met the needs of various stakeholders, including different teams within local government, community energy, network operators, and investors. After doing so, the team observed that projects are coming together more quickly. For example, £500,000 has already been secured to support the community energy beyond the NZL programme.

Realising the benefits of collaboration

The team's approach has helped others to realise the benefits of local energy planning and community energy, encouraging further collaboration. For example, planners have a stronger strategic evidence base to inform several local plans, schools have benefited from lower bills delivered through community-owned solar installations, and a business advisory service has worked with economic growth teams to provide additional support to small and medium enterprises.

Key learnings

- Flagship projects or initiatives can embed climate from the 'bottom up': project delivery helps forge connections between teams. It makes the wider benefits of climate action more visible, including community empowerment, business support, and improved public services.
- Strong partnerships can drive collaboration: the project's success is rooted in strong partnerships which enable shared governance, expertise exchange and action beyond traditional boundaries.
- Practical outcomes can encourage buy-in: rather than relying on strategies, the
 project has fostered collaboration by offering tangible benefits to other teams. This
 encourages wider buy-in, which is especially valuable ahead of local government
 reorganisation.



Climate as a council priority

Some places have benefited from political support for climate action to be recognised as a priority by the council. This is true of Bristol City Council, as explored in the case study below.

While this support will not materialise in all areas and is beyond the control of individuals, officers can build relationships across teams, supporting a shared vision and development of closely aligned strategies. To reduce reliance on individuals, several councils involved in the Net Zero Living programme have successfully formalised joined-up working through programme boards or delivery groups for different strategies involving diverse teams.



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Case study: Bristol City Council

For Bristol City Council, reducing carbon emissions has been a priority for well over a decade, having published its first climate change strategy in 2004.

A combination of continuous political support, the council's strategic structure and policy risk assessments have helped to embed decarbonisation across the council, with climate resilience being the next area of focus.

Strategic leadership

In 2016, the then Mayor of Bristol introduced a 'One City' approach, underpinned by the UN Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁰

The governance of this approach involves six City Boards which bring together public, private, and third-sector partners to guide progress on each theme, including environment, transport, and homes and communities.

The One City strategic framework and strong, cross-party political support for climate action acts as a guide for all officers when refreshing strategies or proposing policy changes, irrespective of team or department. The ambition is for all teams to reflexively and proactively consider carbon implications as they align their activities with the 'One City' strategic priorities. The goal is to consider and mitigate any negative environmental impacts of proposals at the outset, rather than addressing later.

The council is also guided by its Corporate Strategy, which requires teams to work collectively towards cross-cutting goals, such as addressing climate change and improving public health.

Role of the climate team

With climate embedded as a strategic priority across all departments, the climate team can focus more on providing specialist advice on decisions being made by committees.

The team is also refreshing the 'One City' climate strategy, and is focused on embedding understanding of new issues, such as climate resilience. The strategy will include actions to risk assess the council's services and advocate for stronger resilience measures to be adopted across the council, its partners and by national government.

Mission Net Zero

This strategic framework enables the council to undertake ambitious projects, such as Mission Net Zero.¹¹ As a Net Zero Living Programme Demonstrator, the project is overcoming barriers to action by supporting three communities to plan and fund local initiatives, developing an investment plan and creating jobs and providing training for local people.

Key learnings

- Sustained leadership matters: strong, long-term political commitment provides a clear top-down direction for all directorates, culturally embedding core principles.
- Embedding frees up team resources: strategic alignment reduces reliance on specialist climate teams, enabling them to focus on emerging or complex issues, such as climate resilience.
- Consider carbon early: the ambition is for every team to independently embed carbon into early-stage decisions, project and policy design, rather than climate mitigation being a late add-on requiring intensive input.

12 – Interviews Join the Dots

Approach 3





Building capacity and understanding of climate change across multiple teams enables climate change specialists to focus on emerging areas, such as climate resilience, and provide intensive guidance only when needed.

Training and practical tools can also help embed net zero into activities regularly undertaken across teams, such as procurement

Climate change teams are also unlikely to have the specialist skills and technical experience required to enact change across all areas of a local authority, especially as local areas transition from stand-alone projects to holistic, integrated approaches. For example, through Net Zero Living, Manchester City Council trained its finance leaders to understand climate risk, strengthening project delivery, business case development and growing readiness for future investment and co-funding opportunities. 12

Case study: Dorset Council

In recognition that purchased goods and services account for 60-80% of Dorset's carbon footprint, all teams within Dorset Council are being encouraged to integrate sustainability requirements when developing tender documentation.

Funded by the Net Zero Living Programme, the council has developed a user-friendly, time-efficient sustainable procurement toolkit, which will be shared with other councils.

A digital tool provides detailed guidance and relevant wording that officers can download and customise (e.g. tender questions, KPIs, model answers), tailored to different procurement stages and across numerous categories.

To upskill colleagues, the team has developed a bespoke on-demand, modular training course that covers the impacts of climate change and the procurement process. Suppliers will also have access to training, templates and guidance.

Approach 4

Improving decision-making processes

Embedding net zero into governance processes also consistently promotes earlier consideration of carbon emissions across council teams, increasing impact.

For example, most councils require cabinet or committee proposals to be accompanied by a climate or environmental impact assessment, facilitating consistent, evidencebased decision-making. The process often flags new opportunities and risks that may not be otherwise visible to climate teams.



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Cornwall Council led the way, and similar tools are in place across other councils. For example, officers at Dorset Council are guided through an online form which prompts them to produce a high-level environmental impact assessment, which is then reviewed by the climate change team where needed.

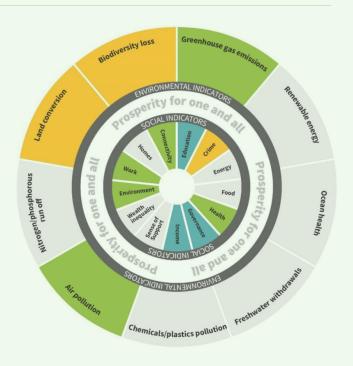
Case study: Cornwall Development and Decision Wheel

To ensure decision-making is evidence-based, justified, and transparent, Cornwall Council was one of the first councils to pilot a decision wheel tool, based on doughnut economics.¹³

Initially piloted in 2019 to assess impacts on climate change for Cabinet decisions, the decision wheel has since been expanded to cover three lenses: environmental, social, equality and inclusion.¹⁴

Accessed through an online portal, it guides officers to provide scores and supporting explanations across numerous criteria, producing a colour-coded assessment of potential impacts. The process encourages early consideration of a consistent and extensive range of factors and helps identify mitigations for any negative impacts.

Figure 2: Cornwall Development and Decision Wheel, as of 2020, as applied to the Saints Trail cycling and walking trail project.¹⁵



Long lasting Short term No known Short term or Long term positive impact or limited impact impact impact impact

Different approaches will suit different places, depending on their responsibilities, local priorities, and resources. Approaches can also be combined to identify opportunities, turn strategies into delivery and sustain action.

14 — Interviews Join the Dots

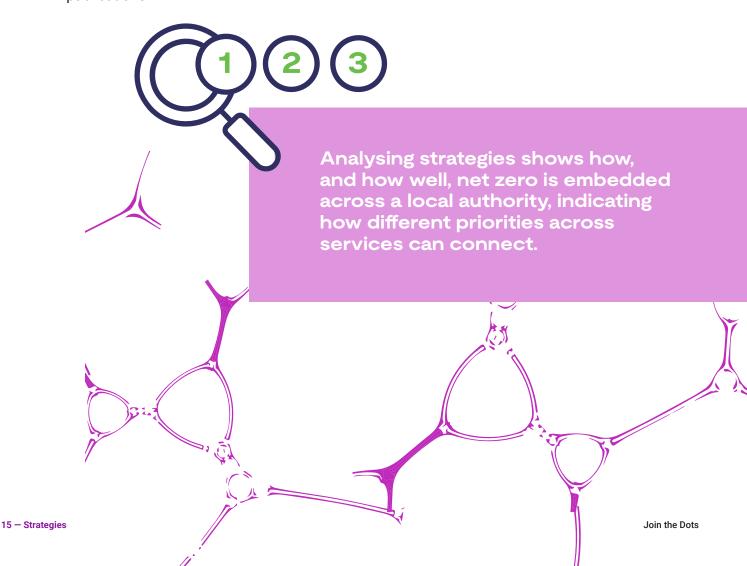
Strategies: Connecting council priorities for climate action

This section of the report is informed by thorough reviews of 15 recent council strategies from across the UK, assessing how they have embedded net zero.

Our review selected local economic, transport and health and wellbeing strategies as these are 'keystone' strategies produced by most authorities. These fulfil statutory duties and sit as a crucial bridge between an area's vision and specific policies and delivery plans.

We focused primarily on strategies developed by the Net Zero Living Programme Demonstrators but also included some developed by other Net Zero participants (Pathfinders and Fast Followers) and councils not involved in the programme, where they offered the most relevant examples of best practice. The councils selected represent rural and urban authorities, as well as different political leaderships.

The review criteria included how climate is framed in the strategy, document structure, and the integration, comprehensiveness and specificity of policy measures. For context, we also reviewed national policy, government guidance and stakeholder publications.



1. Economic growth

Key findings

- All local authority economic strategies reviewed considered climate.
- Geography was important in how net zero was framed, with rural and coastal local authorities seizing the opportunities offered by renewable energy to stimulate local growth, reflecting UK policy's positioning as a 'Clean Energy Superpower'.
- In more urban areas, there was a stronger focus on infrastructure investment and climate resilience, with climate change more often framed as a challenge faced by business and industry.
- The comprehensiveness of policy measures varies significantly. There were gaps in acknowledging the issues of hard-to-decarbonise sectors, such as agriculture and aviation, and a just transition.
- Welsh and Scottish authorities have clearer and more holistic guidance on how they embed climate into economic strategies compared to English authorities.

Governance guidance provides less direction to English local authorities compared to Welsh and Scottish authorities

'Making Britain a Clean Energy Superpower' is one of the five missions of the UK Government, signalling its importance.

However, the government does not have an overarching net zero or 'green prosperity' plan, only strategies focused relatively narrowly on the opportunities from clean energy. 16,17

In 2024, the government transferred responsibilities for local economic strategies from Local Economic Partnerships to combined and upper-tier authorities in England. While guidance published in 2023 for local authorities states that growth strategies should be informed by other local plans, such as tourism and transport plans, it does not specify areas to address, such as climate change, or require alignment with national economic priorities.¹⁸

Following the English Devolution Bill, all Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be required to produce a Local Growth Plan. Similarly, the related guidance does not reference any specific issues, only the need to develop cross-cutting 'shared priorities'.¹⁹

In comparison, in Wales and Scotland, regional economic plans must align with national policies that encourage a more holistic consideration of economic growth and net zero, such as the Scottish National Strategy for Economic Transformation and the Welsh Wellbeing Goals.²⁰

Various non-governmental organisations offer resources for councils, such as the LGA,²¹ the What Works Centre for Economic Growth²² and the Inclusive Growth Network,²³ but these are not comprehensive or mandatory. This has contributed to a fragmented landscape of support that can be difficult for capacity-constrained local authorities to navigate.

The priorities and scope of local strategies varied, often depending on geography

Some of the local strategies reviewed strongly emphasised the significant opportunities for inward investment, green jobs and supply chains arising from attracting renewable energy generation projects. As coastal and rural areas, the strategies for Dorset, the Highlands and Islands, and the Liverpool City Region all recognise their natural assets and position net zero as one of their areas' comparative advantages. For example, Liverpool's ambition is to be "pioneers of the green industrial revolution" while the Highlands and Islands strategy states renewable energy is the "primary opportunity for the region" and singles out net zero as the 'driver of change' for the 2020s.

Other strategies, such as those from Manchester and Bristol, recognise the economic benefits of green investment (e.g. in public transport, green skills, and energy infrastructure). However, net zero is not prioritised over other sectors. For example, the Manchester strategy states that: "while growth in [net zero-related] areas will be important, it is unlikely to translate into the scale of productivity improvements we need to achieve."

Rather than decarbonisation, the stronger motivation for investment is improving infrastructure to avoid constraining growth. In these strategies, reducing emissions is seen largely as a challenge faced by businesses. Lower carbon construction standards and resilience planning are some of the proposed policy measures.

Climate and non-climate measures are not always well integrated into local strategies

Climate is much more deeply embedded in some strategies than others, with the proposed measures varying in their comprehensiveness and specificity.

Rather than focusing on economic growth, the Liverpool City Region strategy recognises that 'shared prosperity' is the outcome of better health, thriving places, successful businesses and a healthy natural environment, which are all mutually reinforcing. While climate is only one among many underpinning themes (e.g. innovation, inclusivity), relevant policy measures can be found in a climate-focused section and throughout most other chapters, indicating strong integration. Bristol City Council also adopts a holistic approach, linking each theme to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Other strategies either have a standalone chapter narrowly focused on a few climaterelated measures or inconsistently draw out the relationships between measures under different themes (e.g. housing, people and labour markets).

Inconsistent acknowledgement of far-reaching implications of climate change – and hard-to-decarbonise sectors

The strategies vary in how they acknowledge the risk of 'left behind' sectors and communities and the extent of change demanded by the transition. As part of achieving a just transition, the Liverpool City Region strategy includes targeted measures for reskilling, decarbonising high-carbon sectors, and promoting carbon literacy within businesses and communities. The Highland and Islands strategy describes capturing the social and economic benefits locally.

Most strategies do not clearly state that change is needed across all jobs and sectors, nor do they mention screening out investments in high-carbon sectors. For example, the rural and coastal strategies focused on renewable energy do not seek to address emissions from agriculture, marine or tourism sectors, while several strategies describe increasing global trade, airport and port expansion, with high-level references to greater use of sustainable fuels.



18— Strategies — Economic growth

Review of local economic growth strategies

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Criteria	Liverpool City Region Plan for Prosperity (2023) ²⁴	Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Strategy (2025-2035) ²⁵	Bristol One City: Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy (2020) ²⁶	Energising Dorset Economic Prospectus - Growth Strategy (2025-2040) ²⁷	Investing in Success: An Economic Strategy for Manchester (2023) ²⁸
Summary	Uses shared prosperity as a lens, with climate-related measures fairly well integrated throughout.	Sees renewable energy as a major opportunity for growth, strong emphasis on just transition.	Focused on maximising the benefits from the green economy, using the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).	Focused on the 'clean energy super cluster' opportunity but includes detailed steps.	Strongly focused on increasing productivity with some relevant climate measures are embedded.
Goals related to climate	Strategic priority is to be pioneers of the green industrial revolution.	Goal is to maximise the economic and community benefits from renewable energy investments.	Overarching principle is to increase the city's resilience and sustainability.	Delivery of a 'Dorset Clean Energy Super Cluster' to drive investment, productivity growth, jobs and skills.	Desired outcomes are resilience to a changing climate and capitalising on the associated opportunities.
Framing of climate change	Shared prosperity described as outcome of better health, thriving places, successful businesses and a healthy natural environment.	Renewable energy is the primary opportunity for the region, ensuring local communities benefit.	References the city's climate strategy. UN SDGs used to show impacts, including climate action.	Positions Dorset as a destination for international investment in clean energy, utilising natural assets.	Focused on increasing productivity but acknowledges all growth must be sustainable. Rarely mentions carbon targets.
Integration of policy measures	One section focuses on climate, but many references throughout.	Major theme throughout, well integrated. Just transition is cross- cutting theme.	One dedicated climate section, but SDG icons indicate links to climate action throughout.	Clean energy is a standalone section, but section but also integrated into innovation and skills section.	One section on climate. Infrastructure investment to facilitate growth, not cut carbon.
Specificity of climate-related policy measures	High-level, but supported by case studies e.g. Mersey Tidal Power.	Clearly defined and pinpoint specific regional needs.	High-level, with limited detail on 'investment into infrastructure'.	Spatially targeted and technology- specific projects and target measures.	All high-level, but some climate- related ones are very generalised.
Comprehensive of climate-related measures	Wide-ranging measures. Also discusses just transition, reskilling and targeted support for high carbon sectors.	Highly comprehensive and tailored. Overlooks emissions from agriculture. Mentions screening investment for climate impact.	Covers key areas (e.g. skills, supply chains) but not climate resilience or high carbon sectors. Planning airport expansion.	Detailed energy policies, but wider climate-linked issues (e.g. agriculture, supply chain resilience) are not mentioned.	Relatively narrow measures, focused on construction standards, skills and infrastructure.

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Case study

Dorset Council

Climate action is well embedded in Dorset, thanks to highly visible political leadership and recognition of the wider benefits of climate action.

Political support

In recent years, climate action has been recognised as a corporate priority. This is reflected in the council leader holding the portfolio for climate change, having a corporate director for climate, strong public-facing communications, and a climate change strategy that has cross-party support.

As a result, its new Council Plan,²⁹ adopted in 2025, includes 'Responding to the climate and nature crisis' as one of the council's four priorities.

Embedding climate change in wider policy and programmes

This clear corporate steer is accelerating action across the council by nurturing activity across wider functions organically, without the need for a push from the climate team.

In 2025, Dorset released its Economic Strategy, Energising Dorset, which includes Clean Energy as one of its seven ambitions.³⁰ It positions Dorset as a 'Clean Energy Super Cluster', aiming to attract £28 billion in international investment in projects, including offshore wind energy, its deepwater port at Portland, hydrogen, manufacturing, carbon capture and storage, as well as nuclear small modular reactors.

The inclusion of clean energy in the economic strategy was driven by the economic growth team, who recognised the significant wider benefits of climate action and alignment with council priorities. They have also led subsequent project delivery. The prominence of clean energy in the economic strategy supports officers working on the project, strengthening resourcing and cross-team collaboration.

Similar success has been seen in early-stage discussions on an emerging new Local Plan, design code and Local Transport Plan. Multiple teams have advocated for climate change to be at the centre of these new policies.

Key learnings

- Political leadership and cross-party support are vital: continually reiterating climate as a priority signals its importance.
- Embedding climate in a corporate Council Plan mainstreams action: making it a headline organisational priority normalises its consideration without the need for pressure from climate officers.
- Empowering non-climate teams to lead climate-aligned initiatives is beneficial:
 Dorset's economic team independently championed clean energy, elevating it
 as a strategic opportunity. When climate goals align with broader priorities, other
 departments can take ownership, freeing up specialist teams and amplifying their
 impact.
- Highlighting the wider benefits demonstrates the case for change: the
 quantification of growth and jobs potential in the economic strategy reiterates
 the wide-ranging benefits.

Case study

Orkney Island Councils

Renewable energy is central to the Highlands and Islands regional economic strategy. In 2024, the Orkney Islands Council received Net Zero Living Programme funding to electrify their refuse collection vehicles and deliver a community wind farm.

Embedding net zero

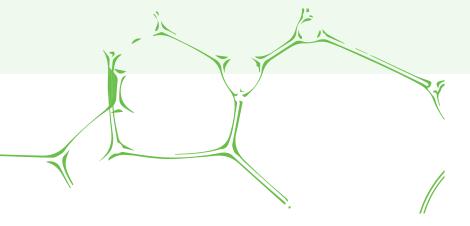
Project delivery has involved extensive collaboration between the 'Enterprise and Resources' directorate within the council and other teams, including legal, finance, and engineering. This has embedded understanding of zero carbon technologies, breaking down organisational silos and building knowledge which will be important as the council scales up decarbonisation efforts.

Building the case

The Orkney Community Wind Farms are forecast to deliver up to £5.5m in profit per year, and a community benefit fund worth over £430,000 a year.³¹ Strong alignment with regional growth strategies has strengthened political and community support, especially given restricted council budgets and high energy prices.

Key learnings

- Connecting environmental, economic and social benefits strengthens support: aligning renewable energy investment with regional growth across strategies and in project communications helps secure political and public backing
- Collaborative project delivery builds expertise: working across teams embeds knowledge of zero carbon technologies and supports future scaling.



2. Local transport plans

Key findings

- There is widespread recognition of the need to decarbonise transport across the UK and forthcoming national strategies are likely to reinforce this.
- Local transport strategies share similar visions and priorities, often centred on reducing private car mileage through a suite of comprehensive measures.
- However, they vary in how strongly climate is positioned to justify interventions and the level of ambition set out.

Fresh national strategies and guidance may better assist local authorities

Upper-tier local authorities and combined authorities in England must produce local transport plans (LTPs). However, guidance was last updated in 2009³² and does not give substantial weight to decarbonisation.

In comparison, Scottish guidance³³ emphasises that local strategies should support the National Transport Strategy³⁴ which includes climate action as a priority, and provides standardised criteria for option appraisal, including some related to climate change. In Wales, regional transport plans must focus on achieving a shift to more sustainable transport modes and be accompanied by an integrated wellbeing appraisal, which may include projected carbon emissions.³⁵

In England, renewed focus on decarbonisation is anticipated following the release of technical guidance on quantifying carbon reductions³⁶ and updated guidance on LTPs in 2026. An Integrated National Transport Strategy is also expected in spring 2026, and a strategy on adapting the UK's transport system to the impacts of climate change is in consultation.³⁷

Local transport plans share similar visions, aims and measures

Decarbonisation is mentioned in each of the visions of all five local transport plans we reviewed, indicating a high-level consensus of its importance alongside social and economic priorities. For example, Cardiff Capital Region's vision³⁸ is: "to provide an efficient, affordable and low carbon transport network that enhances quality of life for our people and creates the conditions for shared prosperity..."

The strategies all share a similar core aim: reducing dependency on private cars while improving connectivity. Each identifies similar measures to achieve this, such as investing in public transport, active travel, and shared modes (e.g. car clubs, electric bikes, e-scooters) to improve reliability, affordability and user experience.

Some emphasise economic over environmental concerns

Differences emerge between the strategies in how the shared aim is justified. For example, Liverpool City Region's draft strategy builds a detailed case for major interventions to achieve modal shift, with net zero at its heart. Others, such as York's and Cardiff Capital Region's, cite easing congestion and unlocking growth as the key drivers, with decarbonisation as a benefit.

Not all strategies set out clear carbon pathways

Some strategies are more explicit than others about the extent of the transformation demanded by net zero. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Cardiff Capital Region and Liverpool City Region frame the challenge extensively, referring to national targets and regional carbon pathways. In contrast, the City of York strategy briefly references local targets while Leicestershire Council mentions none.

Some strategies make clearer links than others between policy measures and decarbonisation

The strategies differ in how each policy measure is linked to decarbonisation, with the clearest example being the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority's strategy, which is also accompanied by a quantified carbon assessment.

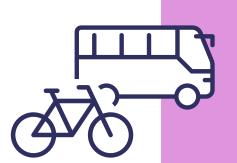
The strategy is structured around the established 'avoid, shift, improve' transport planning framework,³⁹ showing how each measure fits into the overall net zero goal. Under this framework, Avoid focuses on reducing the need to travel (e.g. through land use planning), Shift focuses on switching to more sustainable modes, while Improve focuses on vehicle and fuel efficiency and infrastructure optimisation.

The structures of the other strategies reflect a broader range of social and economic goals (e.g. improving accessibility, connectivity to employment opportunities), with one section typically dedicated to climate-related measures.

The key difference is the extensiveness of the measures within this 'net zero' chapter. Some are highly comprehensive (e.g. Liverpool), while others (e.g. York and Cardiff Capital Region) focus narrowly on tailpipe emissions and encouraging EV uptake. These latter strategies still encompass a wide range of measures that will help reduce emissions (e.g. improving road safety for cyclists and pedestrians, shifting carbased tourism demand, enhancing data collection), but this benefit is inconsistently acknowledged.

Some do not address the compatibility of certain investments with a net zero future All the strategies include one or more policies which could be seen as inconsistent with net zero, such as airport expansion and road capacity enhancements.

The strategies where carbon has been most deeply embedded acknowledge this. For example, Cardiff Capital Region and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CA reference mitigation strategies, such as taking a 'decide and provide' approach to transport planning (rather than the traditional 'predict and provide' approach),⁴⁰ and introducing demand-management measures, such as network charging and parking. Others only reference 'sustainable growth' without detailing how this will be achieved.



Local transport plans share similar aims but vary in how strongly they connect the need to decarbonise travel with different policy measures.



Review of Local Transport Strategies

					N N
Criteria	Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority, Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (2023) ⁴¹	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Draft Local Transport Plan (2025-2035) ⁴²	Transport for Cardiff Capital Region: Draft Regional Transport Plan for South East Wales ⁴³	York Local Transport Strategy (2024-2040), and Implementation Plan ⁴⁴	A Local Transport Plan for Leicestershire, Core Document 2025-2040) ⁴⁵
Summary	Focused on 'good growth', used the 'avoid, shift, improve' framework to emphasise decar-bonisation.	Ambitious strategy, builds strong case for major intervention to achieve modal shift, including through carbon modelling.	Focused on enabling sustainable growth through public transport while decarbonising.	Focused on reducing car dependency. Congestion and sustainable population growth are the major motivators.	Provides a high- level vision, where protecting the environment is a core theme.
Goals related to climate	Goals include climate, productivity, connectivity, health and safety.	Second goal is achieving netzero carbon and an improvement environment.	Aligned with CCR strategic goals to be a competitive, connected and resilient region.	One strategic objective is to support delivery of the Climate Change Strategy.	Identifies protecting the environment as one of five core themes.
Framing of climate change	Major driver of change. Includes mileage reduction targets to align with carbon budgets and a quantified Carbon Assessment.	Major driver of change, justified through net zero targets, carbon pathways and TfN travel scenario modelling.	Details carbon targets, regional energy demand, and links with Local Area Energy Plans. Links to Welsh Transport Strategy.	Greater emphasis on reducing car dependency to improve health and congestion, not reduce emis-sions.	Environment recognised after social and economic challenges. Framed as 'embracing innovation'.
Integration of policy measures	Framework of 'avoid, shift and improve', makes clear how each measure contributes to decarbonisation.	One goal focused on net zero, but consistent links made through. All proposals will detail carbon impacts.	Net zero section only covers EV uptake. Reducing emissions sometimes mentioned as a co-benefit.	Environmental section focused on tailpipe emissions. Occasional references to carbon/climate.	Core policies linked to protecting environment at very high level.
Specificity of climate-related policy measures	Only sets out desired outcomes, but links to supporting strategies.	Extensive narrative per measure describing implementation.	Detailed actions set out under each policy.	Clearly defined, accompanied by an implementation plan.	Offers thematic aspirations. Supporting documents not yet published.
Comprehensive of climate-related measures	Highly comprehensive, demonstrated through 'avoid, shift, improve' framework.	Very wideranging measures e.g. whole life carbon, space relocation, 'polluter pays' principles and resilience.	Comprehensively covers core areas (public transport, active travel, EVs), plus some extras e.g. resilience, airport sustainability.	Comprehensively covers core areas plus some extras e.g. Movement and Place Plan, freight efficiency, cycleway maintenance.	Unclear as does not identify measures.



Case study

City of York

A ten-year strategic framework is helping the city to better address climate, economic and health priorities holistically, including through its transport strategy.

A 10-year strategic framework

In 2022, the City of York Council adopted 'York 2032', a 10-year strategy for sustainable development which was co-designed with partners. 46 It is underpinned by interdependent strategies covering climate, economy, and health and wellbeing. Each has a programme board, with cross-representation to foster collaboration. Additional aligned strategies cover transport, skills and culture.

The framework has cross-party support and provides long-term direction despite political shifts. The formalisation of cross-functional structures has enhanced organisational resilience, reducing reliance on individual working relationships. This has assisted the climate change team in embedding decarbonisation across the council. Annual reporting against the climate strategy actions also requires information gathering from across the council, thereby strengthening relationships.

Development of the Local Transport Strategy

The climate team had significant involvement in developing York's local transport plan.⁴⁷ They worked collaboratively to balance how to communicate the needs the transport system should address, such as accessibility, affordability and reliability, while reducing carbon emissions. Decarbonisation needs to go hand-in-hand with addressing other challenges, rather than being seen as a trade-off or an isolated issue. Focusing on the win-win opportunities also helps build political and community support.

Future direction

York is currently contributing to the refreshed climate change strategy of the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority, which was formed in 2024. Closer alignment will help secure funding and political support for its ambitious plans, such as exploring joint venture options, expanding housing retrofit and solar PV, and a potential heat network, building on its successes as one of the Net Zero Living Demonstrators.

Key learnings

- A strong vision drives embedding: the ten-year framework helps teams better address long-term priorities holistically, yet flexibly accommodate policy and project changes.
- Cross-functional structures build resilience: programme boards maintain momentum despite political or staff changes.
- Early input in major strategies improves outcomes: as illustrated by the transport strategy development process, this helps to embed climate thinking and clearer communication of priorities.
- **Devolution offers opportunities:** fresh regional partnerships, strategies and projects may enable climate to be more deeply embedded where priorities align.

3. Health and wellbeing strategies

Key findings

- Despite gaps in national guidance, all the strategies reviewed recognise to some extent the relationship between health outcomes and climate or net zero. They often focused on the risks presented to communities from a changing climate.
- There were many missed opportunities to consistently highlight the wider benefits of climate action or set out well-rounded policy measures.
- Within our sample, no substantial differences between predominantly rural and predominantly urban authorities were observed.

Nationally, local authorities and health services are working in closer partnership, but national guidance overlooks climate

Across the UK, local authorities are working more closely with the NHS and related partners to develop integrated health, social care and wellbeing strategies. However, climate change is rarely mentioned in statutory guidance.

In England, local authorities and Integrated Care Boards must produce Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies to meet local needs and reduce inequalities. The strategies should encourage integrated working within local authorities across health-related services, including housing, transport, the economy and environment.⁴⁸

Similarly, in Scotland, local authorities must produce joint strategies, and statutory guidance⁴⁹ does not reference climate change. However, Integrated Care Boards must mitigate emissions and adapt services to climate risks under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

Wales takes a different approach, stemming from the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015.⁵⁰ In partnership with local health boards, local authorities must produce joint area health plans as well as plans to improve local economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being, embedding decarbonisation and resilience.

Additional guidance is available, for example, from the UK Government,⁵¹ the Welsh Government's Health and Social Care Adaptation Toolkit,⁵² the Royal College of Psychiatrists⁵³ and Sustainability West Midlands.⁵⁴ However, these are becoming out-of-date, target different audiences (e.g. service providers) or are narrower in scope than health and wellbeing strategies.

Many strategies recognise climate risks but vary in how strongly these are emphasised

Most of the strategies recognise the importance of climate change to health and wellbeing due to the challenges posed and the need to minimise greater harm through mitigation efforts, in varying levels of detail. For example, Oxfordshire County Council describes climate as a 'building block' of health, alongside the built environment and financial wellbeing. Newham Council does similar.

Some strategies offer a more tailored, localised assessment of the risks and opportunities than others. The Cardiff Partnership strategy contrasts 'Cardiff Today' with 'Cardiff Tomorrow', providing a detailed, thematic overview of recent regional trends in emissions, resource consumption, and energy demand. It also describes expected changes to summer temperatures and sea levels in Wales, helping to contextualise the health implications.

Taking a similar but less detailed approach, Oxfordshire's strategy sets out the increasing frequency of flood events and number of premature deaths linked to poor air quality in the county. In other strategies, the risks and benefits listed are generalised and vary in comprehensiveness. This weakens the case but can allow for clearer graphical illustrations, such as in York's strategy.

While there are occasional, brief references deep within chapters, the strategies rarely explicitly refer to council or national net zero targets. Newham and York's strategies highlight how the health and wellbeing strategies align with other major council strategies, while Cardiff Partnership's strategy refers to the One Planet strategy in its introduction.

Most strategies miss opportunities to highlight the wider benefits of climate action

There was significant variation in how the policy measures incorporated climate, in terms of their strategy structures, the range of actions included and the extent to which they explicitly described the wider benefits of climate action.

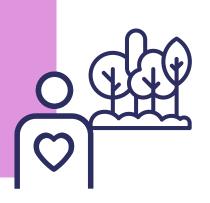
Newham's strategy is the most highly integrated and comprehensive. It has climate as a 'golden thread' running through all the thematic policy chapters, with four climate-specific steps and numerous related measures under other steps (e.g. cold homes, food security, circular economy). The appendix summarises the alignment, making clear the positive interaction between decarbonisation and improving health outcomes.

Other strategies, such as Leicestershire's, include a relatively wide breadth of policy measures, such as air quality, housing, planning and fuel poverty, but group these into one section, missing potential opportunities to show the linkages with other priorities or augment other initiatives.

Others, such as Oxfordshire's, include potentially relevant measures, such as increasing physical activity through active travel, but barely acknowledge carbon emission reduction as a benefit. Several, such as Cardiff and York, comprehensively describe the risks and a vision for change, but then primarily focus on policy measures to decarbonise their organisations (e.g. zero-emission fleets, buildings), rather than addressing area-wide carbon emissions or improving resilience.



While strategies recognise the risks posed by climate change, they often fail to connect climate action with its potential health benefits, for example, through delivering warmer homes and cleaner air.



Review of Health and Wellbeing Strategies

					N.
Criteria	50 Steps to a Healthier Newham (2024-2027) ⁵⁵	Leicestershire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022-2032) ⁵⁶	Cardiff Wellbeing Plan (2023-28) ⁵⁷	Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Oxfordshire (2024-2030) ⁵⁸	York Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022-2032) ⁵⁹
Summary	Highly comprehensive, with climate as a 'golden thread' and wide-ranging, cross-cutting policy measures.	Climate recognised alongside social and economic factors affecting health but not as a priority.	Impact of climate change is integrated into vision for change but has relatively narrow climate measures.	Climate is framed as a 'building block of health' and growing risk. Focus on reducing organisational emissions.	Goal-oriented strategy focused on inequalities. Illustrates high-level positive relationship between health, economy and climate.
Goals related to climate	To 'deliver benefits to equity, climate and inclusive economy alongside health benefits'.	Commitment to the 'social model of health', but climate is not mentioned in the priorities.	Objectives include 'One Planet Cardiff'.	Climate is one of 10 priorities, framed as building block of health.	Climate not included in ambitions or goals, which are all health focused.
Framing of climate change	Recognises climate, equity and inclusive economy as 'golden threads'. Links to Just Transition Strategy.	No mention of climate targets. Introductory references to 'environmental quality'.	Describes major risks to health presented by climate change, especially for vulnerable groups.	Recognises threat of climate change to health, illustrated by local data on extreme weather, flooding, and air pollution.	Framed as 'creating the conditions' to achieve health-focused goals.
Integration of policy measures	Highly integrated. Four climate specific steps as well as embedded into many other steps. Appendix details the relationships across all steps.	Climate integrated with employment, housing and crime, under 'strong foundations'. Chances missed to articulate the wider outcomes of climate action.	Major climate focused chapter and climate risk mentioned frequently in thematic 'Cardiff tomorrow' assessments.	Fairly well integrated. One chapter on climate, with some related measures distributed through other chapters.	Section on the 'building blocks of health' includes an infographic showing links between health and wellbeing, the economy and climate change.
Specificity of climate-related policy measures	Detailed and identifies specific actions, KPIs, measures and partners.	High-level. Especially unclear how some climate related measures will be implemented.	Climate-related measures developed in similar detail to others and largely clear.	Most climate related measures developed in less detail than non-climate ones.	Measures in Action Plan do not mention climate or energy.
Comprehensive of climate-related measures	Extensive actions identified, spanning many themes and services. Shared benefits are clear.	Covers key areas e.g. air quality, active travel, fuel poverty but wider opportunities not identified.	Focused on decarbonising estate, fleet and procurement. Does not cover, e.g. fuel poverty.	Immediate actions are narrow, mainly organisational emissions, but 2030 ambitions are broader.	Measures in Action Plan do not mention climate or energy.



Newham Council

Through strong political leadership, collaborative senior managers, and streamlined governance, Newham Council has pioneered a highly integrated approach to delivering climate action and embedded a just transition within its public health strategy, '50 Steps to a Healthier Newham'.⁶⁰

A Just Transition

In 2023, Newham Council became the first UK local authority to publish a Just Transition Plan, ensuring that decarbonisation goes hand-in-hand with increased equity and long-term resilience. Supported by Innovate UK's Net Zero Living Programme, the council expanded the Climate Action team, placing a Senior manager in the Resource Directorate, alongside legal, procurement, HR and similar teams. This signalled the importance of climate action to the council and enhanced influence.

Implementation is driven by the monthly Climate Action Delivery Group, which involves diverse teams, including transport, area regeneration, education, air quality, inclusive economy, property, parks and resident engagement. The group identifies opportunities to embed the just transition principles into the borough's health and wellbeing strategy. As they are closely aligned, the group now monitors the health and wellbeing strategy, streamlining efforts and reinforcing integration. Similar collaboration has shaped the forthcoming Local Plan and Newham Growth Plan.⁶¹

Collaboration

Strategic alignment is reinforced through bespoke training, also funded through Net Zero Living, to familiarise staff with the just transition principles and identify actions. For example, adult social care teams were equipped with advice and communication materials to better support vulnerable residents during heatwaves.

Next steps

To more deeply embed the just transition, the climate action team is supporting the development of a new procurement policy and social value framework. A greater emphasis on sustainability in the procurement policy will help scale up efforts, tackling the council's total emissions (over 96%) that come from its purchased goods and services.

Key learnings

- Combining 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches to embedding can be highly
 effective: documenting the just transition principles then championing these
 through targeted initiatives has been crucial to success, especially given the
 concept's relative novelty.
- Cross-functional governance drives integration: regular meetings are needed to practically and continually embed the just transition principles across council directorates.
- Embedding climate into health and wellbeing strategies streamlines effort: aligning monitoring processes reduces duplication, ensures consistent progress and fosters collective ownership.

Conclusions

Different approaches are valuable but more clarity is needed.

From interviewing officers, it was clear that the strategies we researched had different levels of involvement from climate teams and the strategies themselves had varied influence as a tool to drive net zero delivery.

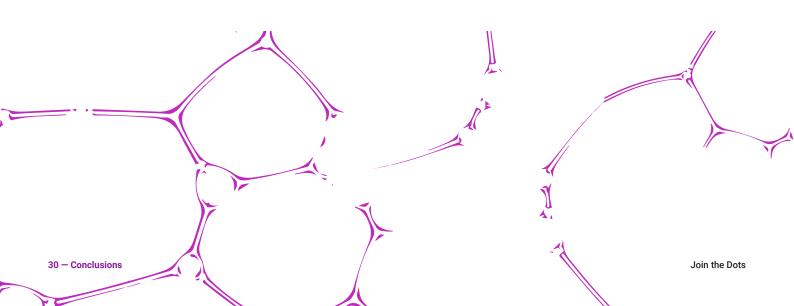
Different places had also taken different approaches to embedding climate across their organisations. Often, combining approaches or using different approaches at different stages helps deliver results. Some approaches are best at identifying opportunities, while others help turn strategies into delivery and sustain action.

In some places, making the wider outcomes of climate action the driving force of collaborative working is valuable. For others, projects, such as those funded by the Net Zero Living programme, offer a mechanism to make the benefits tangible to other departments, embedding net zero from the 'bottom up'.

Elsewhere, upskilling colleagues can embed net zero in day-to-day working and harness specialist skills. Strengthening decision-making processes can also encourage holistic consideration of climate change. In authorities where climate is recognised as a corporate priority, this can encourage embedding from the 'top down'. Officers can support this through building relationships between teams and formalising joined-up working arrangements, such as partnership boards.

However, there is significant variability between councils in the maturity of these approaches and their capacity to drive embedding. We heard that a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities, partly due to the lack of statutory functions on climate change in England at a local area, can also undermine efforts to embed net zero.

Devolution and local government reorganisation present significant opportunities to change this. For example, Net Zero Living participant Westmorland and Furness Council used the transition from districts to a unitary authority in 2021 to make climate change a core corporate priority, redesign processes, and develop a new climate strategy, with actions shared across departments.



Climate features in all strategies, but integration is not comprehensive.

Our analysis showed that climate was an important element in all the local economic, transport and health and wellbeing strategies analysed.

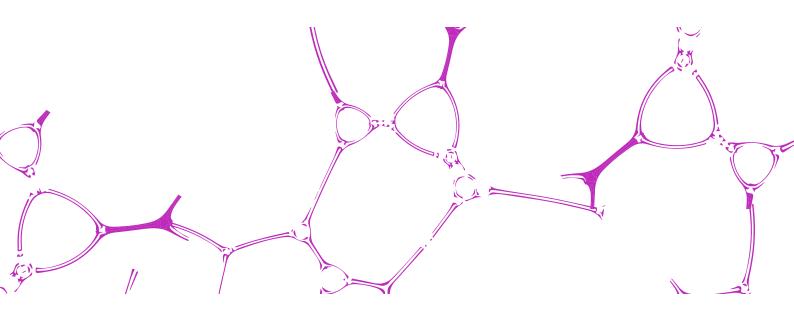
While our focus was on the NZL Demonstrators, which could be expected to illustrate best practice, this is a significant and positive finding in itself. Many focused on decarbonisation measures, but climate resilience was also increasingly discussed.

However, strategies varied in how they framed net zero. For example, economic strategies varied in the relative emphasis they placed on the opportunities presented by the transition, such as green jobs, compared to the challenges, such as extreme weather and resource constraints. Often, this reflected geography, with more rural and coastal areas focused on the benefits presented by their natural assets.

Some strategies embedded net zero more comprehensively and consistently than others. For example, despite sharing similar aims and measures to reduce private car dependency, some transport strategies focused on decarbonisation as a major driver of change, while others focused on economic concerns. Many health and wellbeing strategies missed opportunities to highlight the co-benefits of action on net zero or narrowly focused on reducing organisational emissions.

Notably, many areas struggled to acknowledge issues related to hard-to-decarbonise sectors and articulate the extent of change required. For example, in economic and transport strategies, some barely recognised emissions from agriculture, industry or airport expansion. Few clearly articulated how they will work towards a just transition.

While strategies should reflect local needs and priorities, some inconsistencies may be attributed to gaps in UK and devolved government guidance. In Wales, the Wellbeing Goals offer local authorities a stronger framework for coordinated action, while Scottish Government guidance⁶² emphasises the need for 'mainstreaming' climate considerations into all decision-making. While further research would be needed to evidence the relationship between policy and strategy delivery in practice, such guidance (and the related statutory duties) likely encourages local authorities to develop more holistic strategies.

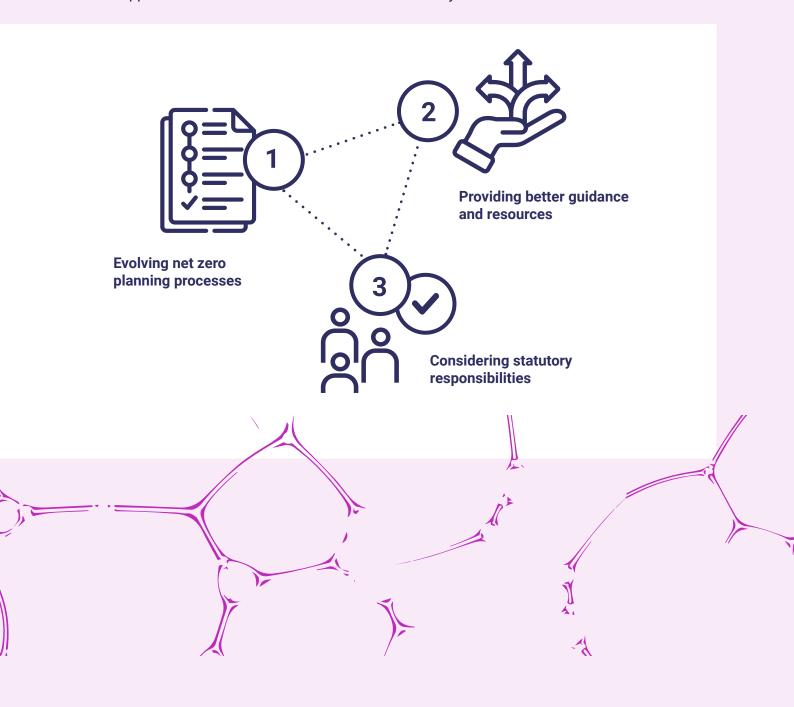


31 - Conclusions Join the Dots

Opportunities for action

Although this report does not offer step-by-step actions for local authorities seeking to embed climate action, the findings and examples presented may be valuable to both national and local government decision-makers.

The opportunities identified over the next few pages could help local authorities connect their priorities to help drive climate action, especially as strategies and governance processes are refreshed following devolution and local government reorganisation in England. We also identify opportunities for national governments to support local authorities in this area more effectively.



32 — Opportunities for action Join the Dots



Opportunities for UK and devolved governments

Our evidence shows that more support from national and devolved governments would assist local authorities to more consistently embed net zero.

This could include:

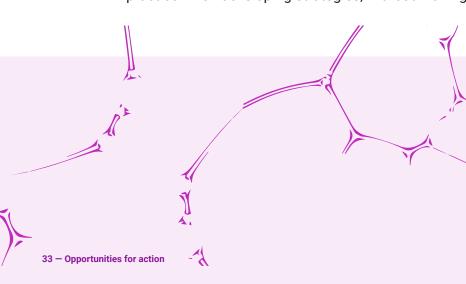
- Continuing to clarify the role of local authorities in the transition to net zero, especially in England, which does not yet have any associated statutory duties.
 NZL participants have emphasised that any additional duties should come with commensurate funding.⁶³
- Updating guidance on local economic, transport and health and wellbeing strategies to more clearly recognise alignment with decarbonisation and climate resilience. Each nation has a different policy context and current guidance, but some overarching suggestions include:

For economic strategies, clarifying national priorities and recognising climate strategies as being among the local plans which should inform local economic strategies.

For transport plans, ensuring forthcoming guidance lends clear support to local authority ambitions on net zero, recognising that vehicle electrification alone is insufficient

For health and wellbeing strategies, making clearer that integrated working can include authorities' climate change teams, and producing tailored guidance with examples of climate risk and initiatives that deliver health and decarbonisation benefits, to foster wider understanding.

 Developing tailored resources to foster greater consideration of climate change by non-specialist teams, especially where guidance cannot be updated. For example, toolkits, engagement and knowledge-sharing events can help illustrate best practice when developing strategies, without making climate action a requirement.





Opportunities for local authorities undertaking net zero planning

Local authorities will take different paths to embedding net zero but many have used net zero planning processes, such as Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs), to drive change internally.

Below, we summarise some different approaches that local authorities can take to embed climate action while undertaking net zero planning more strongly:

- Build cross-party commitment on the benefits of net zero and wider benefits to local areas and different services. Planning processes provide an opportunity to bring departments together and should establish early opportunities to align strategic priorities and work collaboratively. Similarly, when developing strategies, seek to connect climate change and risk with as many wider goals and policy measures as possible.
- Use net zero planning or LAEP processes to explicitly empower and upskill
 officers across the organisation to better understand energy challenges and net
 zero. This helps to overcome resource constraints and harness the specialist skills
 of diverse teams. Find ways to continually champion net zero, such as through
 bespoke workshops and communications.
- Net zero planning processes also often identify flagship projects to showcase the benefits of net zero in action. These can help deliver tangible benefits to different teams and encourage deeper 'embedding'.
- Formalise and strengthen governance processes. For example, strategy
 programme boards or delivery groups increase resilience when councillors or
 staff change. Impact assessments for formal council decisions can identify new
 opportunities and risks, particularly when conducted early enough to allow for
 meaningful change.

34 - Opportunities for action Join the Dots

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36 — References Join the Dots



Join the Dots

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