

Local Net Zero 2.0:

The Moment
to Deliver



UK:
100

About UK100:

UK100 is the only climate network of locally elected leaders that focuses on the delivery of Net Zero. We bring together local authorities across the country to share knowledge, collaborate, and advocate to the UK government with their collective power. Our membership spans the UK, is crossparty, and represents all tiers of local government.

There are now 115 cross-party local leaders in our network committed to meeting Net Zero at least five years earlier than national targets. We represent over 60% of the UK population covering both urban

and rural environments. We produce practical guides like this and enable leaders to speak collectively on how to accelerate the transition to clean energy locally and nationally. You can read more about us here:

<http://www.uk100.org>

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About Climate Insights:

This report was researched and co-written by Karen Barrass of Climate Insights - a climate policy expert with over 20 years experience. Climate Insights offers bespoke research and policy analysis to organisations working to deliver transformational change.



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Executive Summary:

The new Labour Government's ambitious agenda to deliver growth, decarbonise the energy grid, and build 1.5 million new homes, presents an unprecedented opportunity for local authorities to take decisive action. With a strong mandate, the government is eager to move swiftly. However, ambition alone will not overcome the structural challenges that have long hindered progress against these priorities.

Local leadership is increasingly recognised as essential, yet barriers remain. Our previous report 'Powers in Place', found that local authorities are hamstrung by a lack of a defined role, a policy and strategy ecosystem that fails to enable and support local delivery, conflicting remits of public agencies and insufficient funding and resources.

These realities present formidable challenges to the delivery of climate action, despite widespread consensus on its importance. The government's key initiatives — such as launching Great British Energy, setting ambitious house-building targets, and introducing the Warm Homes Plan — are welcome steps. However, much more is

needed to meet these critical goals.

This report focuses on these priorities, pinpointing interventions needed on upcoming legislation and frameworks, that will accelerate action taken by councils in an effort to realise the Government's objectives. It is built on the insights of more than 50 councils. This exercise has helped identify where the system is falling short and where there are opportunities for intervention.

We have developed a series of interventions grouped into two categories: solve and scale. Solve are the actions we need to focus on immediately to accelerate delivery and could deliver short-term outcomes by getting the foundations right. Scale covers longer-term interventions that we need to work towards and includes the request for financial resources when the economics allow.

We also build on how we could leverage existing government funds more effectively and bring in additional financing beyond national government sources. This tiered approach provides a meaningful gateway for sustained progress.

Recommendations:

Built on the perspectives and examples of 50 councils from around the country and backed by international examples, we encourage the new Government and Members of Parliament to use this insight to focus on:

OVERARCHING

- Ensure long-term policy and budget certainty for local authorities, businesses and other key stakeholders empowering them to strategically plan and invest for the long term in line with national targets and goals.
- Reform local authority funding away from short-term competitive pots towards multi-year place-based grants to enable long-term planning, delivery and drawing in private investment.
- Establish a cross-departmental Local Net Zero Delivery Authority to coordinate delivery, define roles, provide feedback on spending mechanisms and ensure local authorities' statutory role in the transition.
- Develop a statutory Net Zero or climate duty for local authorities to take action to contribute to achieving the UK's climate change targets.
- Ensure successful community engagement in place-based climate programmes by supporting local authority-led deliberative processes and launching a national advice and information programme to support the transition.

ENERGY

SOLVE: The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) should require all planning decisions to be compatible with meeting the Net Zero target.

SCALE: Implement a national framework for Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) giving a strategic role and more powers to

local and regional authorities on energy planning.

SCALE: Great British Energy and the NPPF reforms should remove planning barriers and budget constraints for renewables to foster sector growth while ensuring that communities remain central to the changes.

SCALE: The government should put in place a plan for grid expansion that brings together local authorities, communities and other relevant stakeholders to support this infrastructure development.

HOMES

SOLVE: The Future Homes Standard should be implemented at the earliest with a zero carbon buildings standard at its core, removing the need for new homes to be retrofitted at a later date.

SOLVE: Reform the National Planning Policy Framework to prioritise Net Zero in planning decisions.

SCALE: Reform the social housing retrofit funds to act as a catalyst for the rest of the sector, setting the standard for widespread adoption and driving industry-wide reform to meet broader demands.

SCALE: It should be a strategic priority for Skills England to support the development of the construction industry to deliver Net Zero homes at the scale and quality required.

Climate action has moved from commitment to implementation. The new Labour Government has an unprecedented opportunity to reshape the relationship between national, regional, and local governments. These insights will help them seize this opportunity.

Hammond

Christopher Hammond
Chief Executive, UK100



Government legislation and priorities: What must it have to accelerate local delivery?

The Clean Energy Mission, Great British Energy and Local Power Plan

✓ The government should put in place a plan for grid expansion that brings together the National Energy System Operator, Great British Energy, Clean Energy Mission, local authorities, communities and other relevant stakeholders to support this infrastructure development.

✓ A national framework for Local Area Energy Plans should be put in place giving a strategic role and more powers to local and regional authorities on energy planning backed by non-competitive funding and resources. GB Energy should allocate dedicated funding for council-commissioned LAEPs.

✓ A plan to deliver on the commitments to municipal and community energy highlighted in the founding statement must be developed to ensure a robust expansion of the sector.

English Devolution Bill (formerly the Take Back Control Bill) and new Framework for English Devolution

✓ The draft Bill has yet to be published, but we would urge that net zero is at the heart of the bill and to be a key point of consideration in all programmes and reforms, it is not enough to bring forward a local growth duty, without a clear link to net zero.

✓ Ensure long term budget certainty for local authorities, businesses and other key stakeholders. Devolved funding will support strategic local planning, foster sustainable growth, and enable the development of local areas in line with national targets and goals.

National Planning Policy Framework Consultation

✓ Reframe the National Planning Policy Framework to prioritise Net Zero and make zero carbon homes the standard.

✓ Remove planning barriers for renewables and simplify processes for both developers and local authorities to foster sector growth. Ensure communities remain central to the changes and directly benefit from the projects.

Mandatory housing targets and the plan for 1.5m new homes

✓ The Future Homes Standard reforms should be implemented with a zero carbon buildings standard at its core for all these homes.

✓ Reform the Energy Performance Certificates to better reflect the actual energy performance.

Skills England

✓ It should be a strategic priority for Skills England to support the development of the construction industry to deliver Net Zero homes at the scale and quality required.



Background:

In 2024, on the eve of the General Election, the UK marked the fifth anniversary of enshrining Net Zero into law, bookending a period of climate progress with milestones that include the Net Zero Review and hosting COP26 in Glasgow. COP26 was the first international climate change conference to explicitly recognise the role of local government in achieving national and international climate goals, while the Net Zero Review called for a “local big bang” of climate progress.

Despite these milestones, the pace and scale of national action has not risen to meet the urgency of the challenge. Local leaders, meanwhile, have been at the vanguard of climate action. Five years on from legislating for Net Zero by 2050, and following a general election that has ushered in the first change in government in over a decade, Britain stands at a critical juncture in its Net Zero journey. The role of local authorities in that journey has never been more vital.

Over 340 local authorities have declared a climate emergency, acknowledging the

urgent need for action. Almost two-thirds of councils in England aim to be carbon neutral by 2030, with similar ambitious targets set across Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

The current national policy ‘framework’ remains siloed and highly centralised, with limited oversight and knowledge sharing. Short-term, competitive, and small-scale funding pots have been one of the most critical challenges, coupled with an unstable policy landscape. Many initiatives have been reversed, key local powers usurped, and strategic priorities have been marred by political flux.

Building on the insights from UK100’s Powers in Place handbook and UK100 and the Mission Zero Coalition’s Zero In 2024 report, this report draws on insights from members of the UK100 network to set out the key priorities for supporting local authorities to deliver their ambitions and Britain’s national Net Zero goals. It focuses on devolution and climate action through the lens of local energy and warm homes





◀ initiatives. These sectors are also prioritised due to their significant decarbonisation potential and the key role local authorities play in their delivery.

However, significant challenges remain. As highlighted in the Powers in Place handbook and examined in depth in this report, local authorities face several barriers, including:

- A lack of a defined role in Net Zero delivery
- A policy framework that fails to enable and support local delivery
- Conflicting remits of public agencies
- Insufficient funding and resources to develop capacity

Local authorities face an estimated £4 billion shortfall in finances, with £130 million spent since 2019 on applying for competitive funding pots.

The new government's commitment to reforming funding approaches, moving away from competitive, short-term pots towards long-term, strategic funding, is a welcome

step. However, they need to act on these commitments.

As the new government makes strides towards Britain's Net Zero ambitions, the latest annual report from the Climate Change Committee makes clear the size of the challenge it faces.

This report argues that the integration of devolution and climate action presents an unprecedented opportunity to rise to that challenge. By empowering local communities and leaders to drive climate action, the UK can accelerate its transition to a clean energy superpower while stimulating economic growth from the ground up.

This report foregrounds the views and experiences of local leaders while building on the findings of previous studies and examining the evolving landscape of local climate action in light of recent policy changes. It aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing local authorities in their pursuit of Net Zero goals, and offers actionable recommendations for policymakers at both local and national levels.



The power of Net Zero for local leaders:

The following section reiterates why Local Net Zero is not just a means to reduce emissions, it is also the quickest, most efficient, and most cost-effective path to a more prosperous green economy, which will create jobs, benefit society and build resilience locally and nationally.

The UK Net Zero economy grew 9% in 2023, contributing £74 billion to the economy while the wider economy stagnated. According to analysis from CBI economics, for every £1 million in GVA contributed by Net Zero businesses, nearly £2 million more was added through spillover effects. These opportunities are shown to benefit all regions in the UK, and present an opportunity to increase prosperity in more deprived and left behind communities.

With this in mind, local authorities are best placed to develop and implement Net Zero strategies based on knowledge of the context and capability of the area and their stakeholders, including local businesses, industry and the wider public sector. UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) 2022 analysis in 'Accelerating Net Zero Delivery' found there is a powerful economic case for place-specific climate action. It simultaneously delivers the greatest energy savings and societal benefits at the lowest cost. Analysis by PwC and Innovate UK demonstrates that empowering local

authorities to take tailored, place-based climate action would save £140 billion compared to top-down national approaches to reaching the UK's Net Zero goals. 'The Future is Local' highlighted numerous examples of tangible benefits of Local Net Zero action. For example, community energy groups helped people save an estimated £3.35 million on energy bills via energy efficiency initiatives in England in 2021 alone.

Local Net Zero initiatives foster economic prosperity

Finally, the CBI's analysis showed the West Midlands, a region involved in the trailblazer devolution deal, saw the highest levels of Net Zero related foreign direct investment (FDI) projects in 2022-23, with 34 FDI projects in the region over a year. In Wales, the West Midlands and Yorkshire and The Humber Net Zero businesses are twice as productive as the respective regions' average businesses.¹

The evidence underscores that embracing Local Net Zero initiatives not only drives emissions reduction, but also fosters economic prosperity and adds societal value, positioning local authorities as pivotal actors in maximising local benefits.





Local Net Zero progress since Powers in Place and Zero In:

Following the July 2024 general election, the new Labour government has taken several steps to signal its intention to empower local authorities and accelerate Net Zero progress in the energy and housing sectors by:

- Lifting the effective ban on onshore wind farms
- Signalling the intention to create GB Energy to drive investment in homegrown clean energy projects
- Proposing an ambitious English Devolution Bill to transfer power from Westminster to local communities
- Committing to a Warm Homes Plan upgrading 5 million homes in five years

The King's Speech reinforced the government's commitment to a "presumption in favour of devolution" while anchoring its climate priorities to the Clean Energy missions and house-building targets.

One of the final acts of the previous administration was, as part of the Local Net Zero Accelerator Programme, to award UK100 member the West Midlands Combined Authority £6.2 million to address

the funding gap for Net Zero projects. This supports the development of Net Zero Neighbourhoods in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Coventry.

On local authority funding, the new government has committed to reforming funding approaches, moving away from competitive, short-term pots towards long-term, strategic funding to support local authorities in their Net Zero efforts. However, we have not yet seen the details of any funding reform proposals. This may be addressed through the Spending Review and Autumn Budget.

The Future Homes Standard (FHS) proposals published in December 2023 represent a much-needed improvement over the current status quo by aiming to ensure new homes are "zero carbon ready" through requirements for low-carbon heating like heat pumps and improved fabric efficiency standards.

By mandating low-carbon heating sources and better insulated, airtight building envelopes, the FHS would put new construction on a better trajectory towards Net Zero emissions compared to homes built



under the existing 2021 building regulations. UK100's response to the FHS consultation highlighted, however, that the proposed options did not go far enough in ensuring truly future-proof standards.

We wait to see what happens under the FHS under the new government, but it is vital to have policy certainty alongside their plans to build 1.5 million homes.

The government is also said to be looking at rent reforms for social landlords, providing 10-year settlements that will bring in more certainty to the sector and support the building of social homes.

The new government has made significant strides in its early days, demonstrating a commitment to both devolution and climate action. The lifting of restrictions on onshore wind, the creation of GB Energy, and the

proposal of the English Devolution Bill are all positive steps. However, so far there is a crucial piece missing from this puzzle: the integration of devolution and climate action.

While these initiatives are welcome, they currently seem to exist as parallel tracks rather than a cohesive interconnected strategy. The real potential for transformative change lies in knitting together the golden threads of devolution, growth and climate action.

Local leaders are uniquely positioned to act as engines of creativity and change, attuned to local needs and opportunities. An integrated approach could accelerate Britain's transition to a clean energy superpower while simultaneously driving economic growth from the ground up.

UK100's pre-election asks for the new government

- **Introduce a devolution bill with climate action at its core** in the first King's Speech. This would include a legal duty for all local authorities and public bodies, making them jointly accountable for meeting climate targets and equipping them with the necessary powers and funding to enable delivery.
- **Reform local authority funding** away from short-term competitive pots towards multi-year place-based grants to enable long-term planning, delivery and drawing in private investment.
- **Reform the planning system** to support the delivery of Net Zero homes and local energy security by unlocking renewable energy infrastructure. Invest in a local-led nationwide energy efficiency drive to upgrade the UK's draughty homes, slashing emissions, cutting energy bills, and boosting jobs across the country.
- **Establish a cross-departmental Local Net Zero Delivery Authority** to coordinate delivery, define roles, provide feedback on spending mechanisms and ensure local authorities' statutory role in the transition.
- **Ensure successful community engagement in place-based climate programmes** by supporting local authority-led deliberative processes and launching a national advice and information programme to support the transition.





Overview of the report:



This report is focused on delivery and the future, but to start that journey we need to explore the current barriers holding back local delivery from our members' experience.

Through the workshops, in-depth interviews and surveys the key barriers highlighted were limited funding, and challenges with competitive pots. They said Net Zero gets de-prioritised given it's not a statutory obligation and limited powers along with regulatory and planning barriers impede impactful delivery.

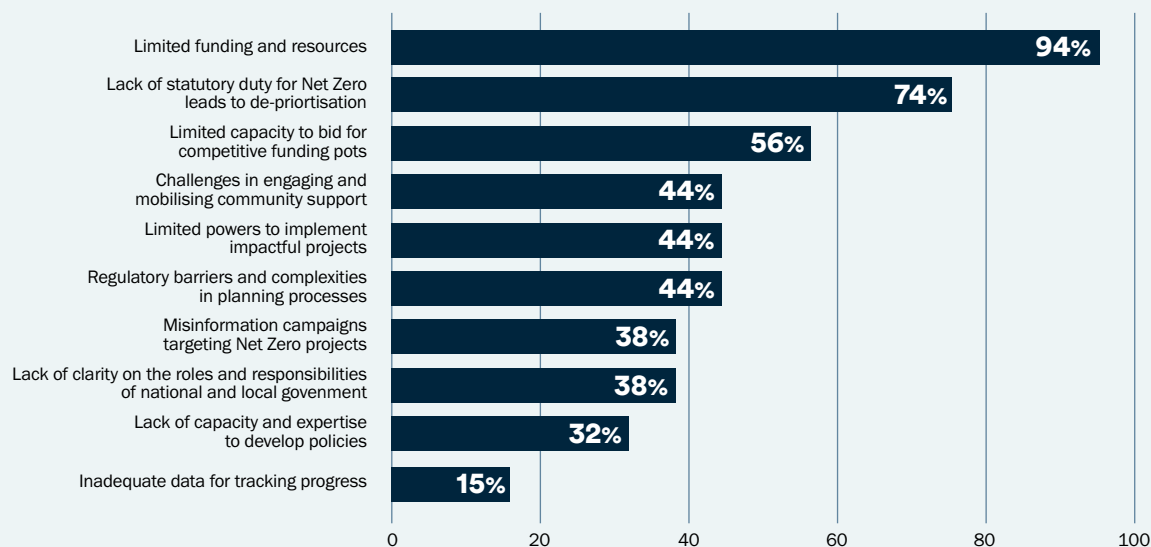
Another critical area for them was securing community engagement which is challenging due to misinformation campaigns that undermine progress.

Following the Mission Zero report which was clear that local authorities are key to the delivery of Net Zero, the recent Zero In² report, emphasised that local authorities need an empowering framework of support from central government – one that combines long-term funding, strengthened powers and a shared commitment to collaborative placemaking.

What changes do local authorities want to see?

Buildings, electricity supply and transport are some of the main contributors to overall emissions³ in the UK. The new government has highlighted its priorities in the King's Speech⁴, subsequent announcements and the

Biggest barriers for delivering on Net Zero ambitions locally



creation of Missions. Energy and housing are high on the agenda with proposed legislation and targets being released. The Energy Mission Board is working to deliver clean power by 2030,⁵ and the government is working to reform the planning system and has issued a consultation to reform the NPPF to be able to deliver on its target of building 1.5 million homes.⁶

Given these priorities, the research is focused on the housing and energy sectors as two of the most significant areas that need rapid decarbonising in the coming years, and where local authorities have a key role to play. Buildings are responsible for around 20% of all of the UK's emissions while electricity, heating and fuel supply together account for about 19%.⁷

The UK's housing stock is one of the oldest and leakiest in Europe and many of the policies that were in place to drive the efficiency improvements needed have faltered or been reversed in the last decade, which means the retrofit challenge is even greater, and thousands of homes have been built that will now also need retrofitting. Skills and supply chain shortages are also compounding these issues. Planning policy and enforcement is key to delivery of Net Zero new buildings while housing policy and powers are critical to energy efficiency retrofit and the decarbonisation of heat.

And for the energy sector, local authorities

have powers and points of influence through both planning and direct investment; with the decarbonisation of heat as a key Net Zero challenge to be delivered at a local level.⁸ In recent times domestic energy security has been a strategic focus of the government and the cost of living crisis and energy price rises have dominated the discourse. In the past two years, more and more local authorities have brought forward Local Area Energy Plans (LAEP) to build a more cohesive approach to energy planning and delivery at the local level.

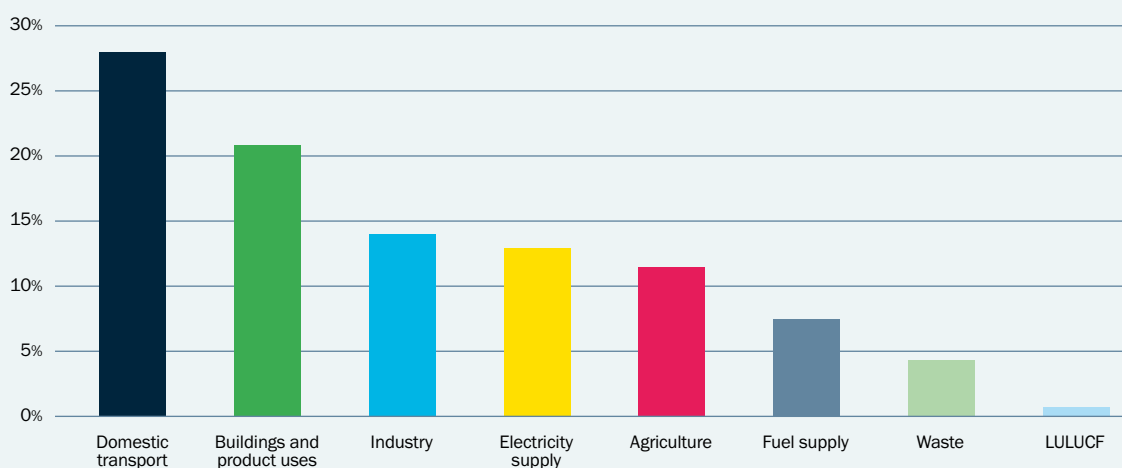
The latest Progress Report (2024) by the Climate Change Committee⁹ highlights that the emissions reductions so far have come from the phase-out of coal but the next stage needs to be driven by the phase-out of oil and gas. Further, the reducing cost of low-carbon technologies presents a timely opportunity to not only reduce emissions, but also drive growth and improve energy security.

Solve - Scale

The research focused on the priority sectors working with local authorities to understand the reforms that would be the most impactful according to local authorities.

These reforms vary in scope and the approach needed for successful implementation. Some can be achieved with minor tweaks in existing regulations,

Net territorial UK greenhouse gas emissions by TES sector, 2022



Source: 2022 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Final Figures, DESNZ, 6 February 2024



some might require additional resources or funding, others may need bigger legislative changes or new legislation enacted, while still others may need a mix of these.

The purpose of categorising these is to highlight which measures can be addressed first by the new government, which ones might need additional funding or further planning on how to attract funding and which others would need new legislation to unlock benefits.

■ **SOLVE:** Reform/regulatory change – the tweaks to the current system that could remove existing barriers. These would be relatively low cost and quick to implement. However, these modest measures would make a material difference to the ability of local authorities to deliver.

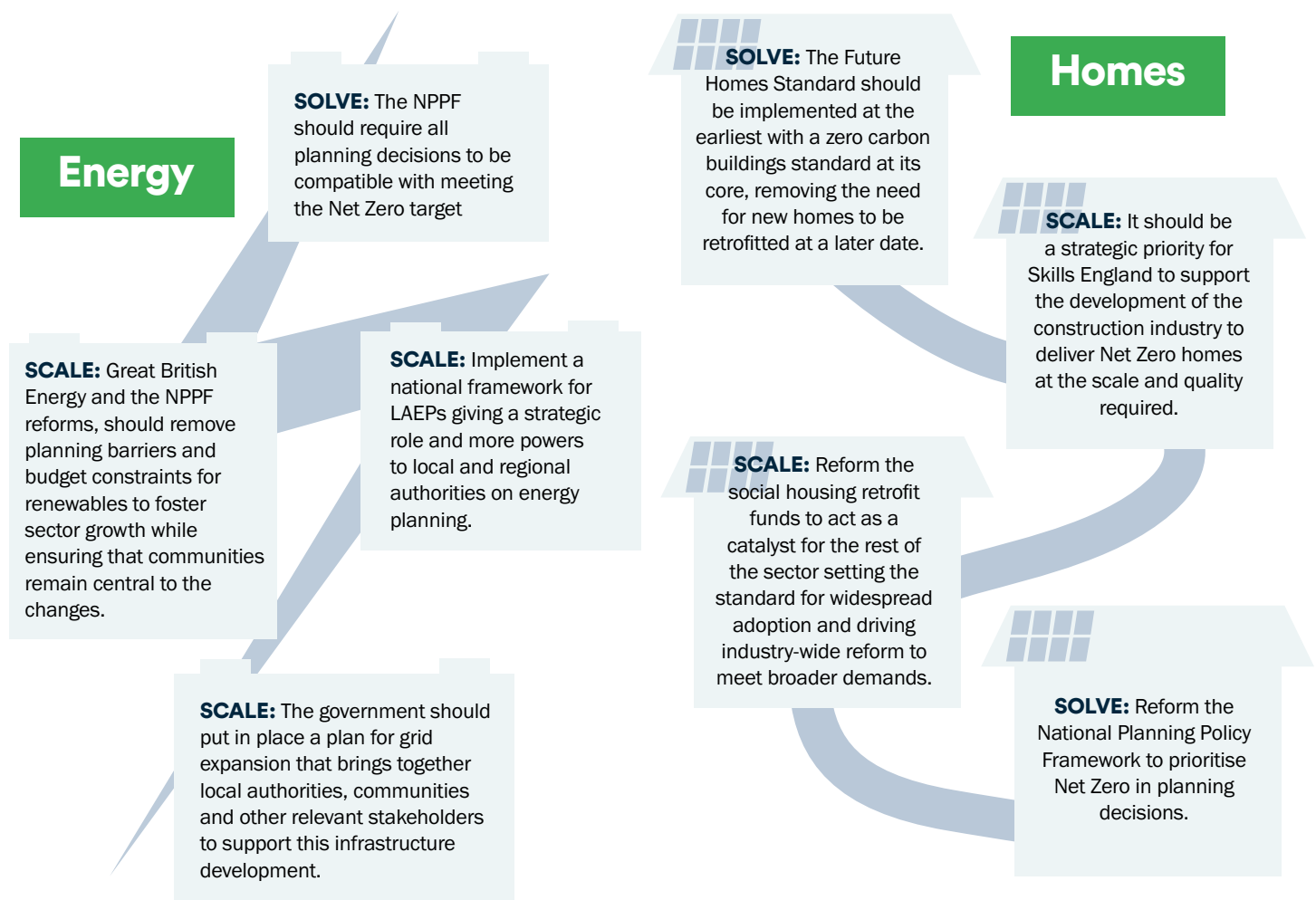
■ **SCALE:** Areas of new legislative activity / strategic approaches or policy. This will need further political leadership to champion. For example, a strategic cross-departmental approach within government /

collaborating with local government through a dedicated Delivery Unit (more details in Chapter 7) could greatly simplify implementation. However, this would enable transformative change in Westminster to the machinery of government. These are areas where funding certainty, additional funding or finance is needed to enable delivery. While this potentially needs slightly longer term support and commitment, it is essential to achieve scale-up and crowd in funding. The present stop-start culture of funding hampers long-term planning locally and makes it difficult for local authorities to develop business models that can attract private finance.

All of the measures outlined in this report will fit into one of these areas, though there are interconnections and crossovers between them. While Solve might be easy to implement and get prioritised, the Scale measures, that are longer term, more ambitious and yield potentially significant benefits need to get underway as a priority too.



Recommendations:



The research:

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This research took a mixed methods approach to ensure a comprehensive analysis and robust findings. The approach integrates desk research, workshops, semi-structured interviews and a survey, each contributing unique insights and data.

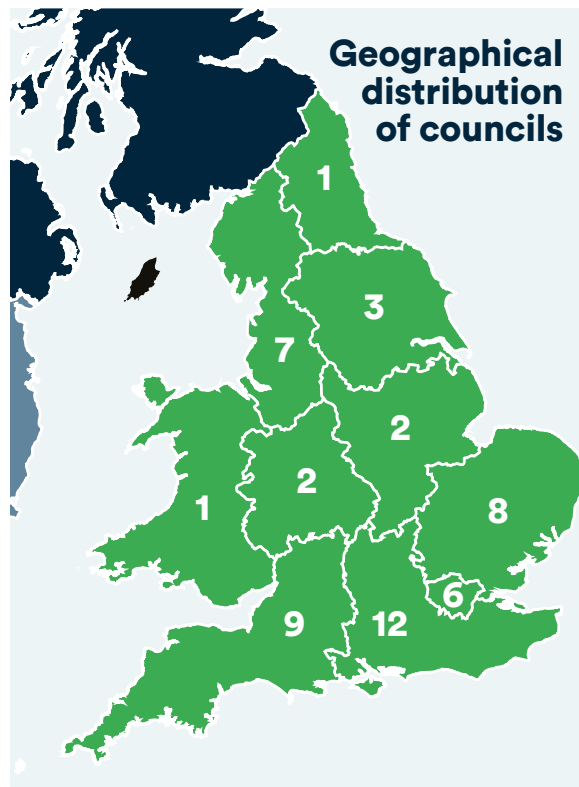
The research methodology ensured a balanced and thorough investigation, gaining qualitative and quantitative insights to inform the report's conclusions and recommendations. It also represents a unique snapshot of what the local government sector thought on the eve of the General Election – an election many saw as vital to the continued delivery of climate action and Net Zero.

Overall, 51 councils participated in the research at different stages, representing 29% of UK's total population. Through the research we engaged with more than 40% of our membership.

The different stages of the research, the purpose and participation is detailed below:

DESK RESEARCH

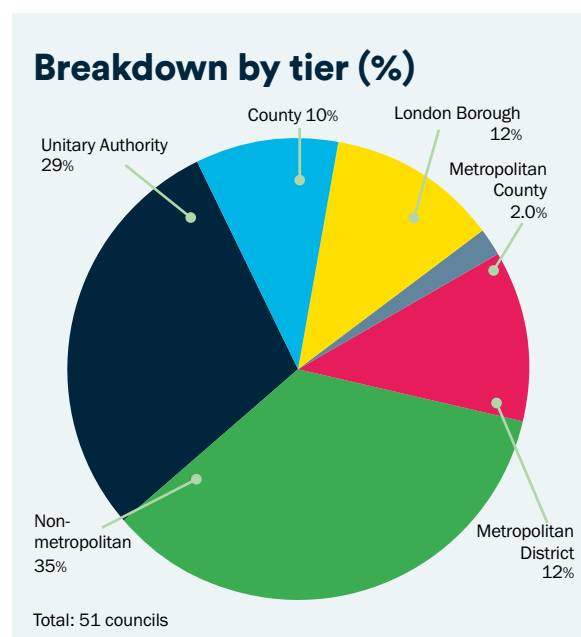
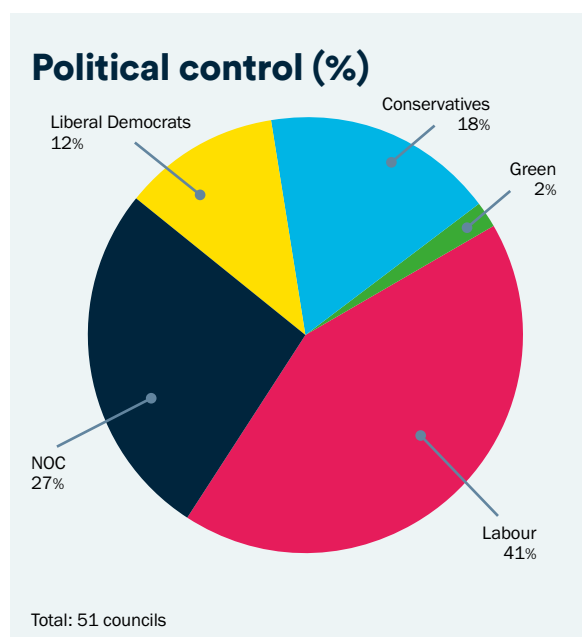
- The initial phase involved extensive desk research to gather information from existing reports. This provided a foundational understanding of the issues,



identified gaps in current knowledge, and informed the development of subsequent research instruments.

WORKSHOPS

- Following desk research, two qualitative workshops and interviews with select UK100 network representatives, including our Countryside Climate Network. These interactive sessions





A session at UK100's Climate Leadership Academy



facilitated collaborative discussions, allowing participants to share their perspectives and experiences.

- The workshops provided a forum for generating new ideas and solutions. In the two workshops we engaged with 29 cross-party members across 28 councils from every tier of local government. They worked in groups and were presented with a long list of policy options.
- Participants were asked to prioritise each measure in terms of its feasibility and likely impact (positive contribution) towards Local Net Zero delivery, and place them on a matrix. They were also asked to prioritise their top five measures from the selection. From these prioritisation exercises, it was possible to develop a short list of policies that were further interrogated in the member survey.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

- To gain in-depth insights, detailed interviews were conducted with stakeholders. These interviews allowed for extensive exploration of specific issues, challenges, and opportunities to understand what the additional powers would help the councils unlock in terms of delivery. These discussions included elected leaders as well as officers to share feedback from their respective

points of view and professional backgrounds. This also ensured the research covered both the political side as well as the delivery side to seek a comprehensive understanding from the key stakeholders at our councils.

- Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted covering different tiers of government and regions.

SURVEY

- Finally, a survey was distributed to all of UK100's then 113 members to collect quantitative data. The survey was designed based on insights from the desk research, workshops, and interviews, ensuring it addressed relevant and critical aspects. The quantitative data from the survey complemented the qualitative insights, enabling a comprehensive analysis of priorities, challenges and trends.

- Thirty-four respondents from 28 councils participated in the survey.¹⁰

The outcomes and results have been analysed to identify those areas where the new government could take action in the first 100 days to cement a strategic path which could make a material difference to how local authorities are able to deliver Net Zero locally.

Empowering local authorities in the energy transition:



Electricity supply was responsible for around 14% of overall emissions in 2022¹¹ and at present around 20% of the total energy is supplied from low-carbon sources.¹² According to the Climate Change Committee's 2024 Progress Report to Parliament¹³, the UK is off track on all indicators of low-carbon technology deployment. In order to meet the targets the UK needs to:

- Increase the annual offshore wind installations by at least three times, double the onshore wind installations and increase the solar installations by five times
- Address that around 10% of all existing homes should be heated using a heat pump compared to the current rate of 1%

It is not just a question of emissions reductions but also energy security, reducing fuel poverty, ensuring price stability and affordability as well as green growth.

It is also a formidable challenge, especially since the overall electricity demand is going to rise as different sectors start to increase electrification such as moving away from gas for heating and petrol/diesel for transport. Estimates suggest it could increase by twofold or more by 2050.¹⁴

The previous government was criticised for back-tracking on policy which is a major deterrent when it comes to long-term planning at a local level and bringing in private investments. They pushed back on the internal combustion engine vehicle ban from 2030 to 2035¹⁵ and the Clean Heat Market Mechanism introduction by a year to 2025.¹⁶

On the latter, the Leader of a unitary authority said: "I would be extremely concerned at any action that reduces the imperative on industry to increase delivery of carbon neutral heating systems. We need to

see the heat pump industry expand to deliver the economies of scale that will eventually make it affordable to everyone. Government legislation is, frustratingly, required to help drive that expansion."

The new government has made significant strides in its early days in office to demonstrate that addressing the current issues with the energy sector are a priority. Overturning the functional ban on onshore wind as one of the very first acts will have a significant positive impact on local authorities' ability to meet their Net Zero targets.

The creation of Great British Energy backed by £8.3 billion over the next parliament will help create jobs and build supply chains across the country. Great British Energy aims to work with local authorities, industry, communities, and other public sector organisations such as the National Wealth Fund. It will also deliver the Local Power Plan "putting local authorities and communities at the heart of restructuring our energy economy".¹⁷ It will help bring in investments but ensure the benefits transfer to local communities, with the target of building around 8GW of small and medium-scale renewable energy projects.¹⁸ These are welcome steps and suggest the government understands the criticality of bringing in private investment through providing clear market signals, policy, and budget certainty. Local authorities again will be the key to delivering on many of these targets and while the government has made its intent of collaborating with local government clear, we are still short on detail and there are some broader barriers currently that need to be addressed.

The energy system faces clear, common challenges in becoming more efficient, smarter and resilient for the future. These issues are highly interconnected and systemic, making them difficult to



address in isolation. This section explores these challenges, emphasising the shared experiences across local areas while acknowledging their unique situations. By adopting a national approach to integrating local energy into the broader system, we can foster a smart, dynamic, renewable,

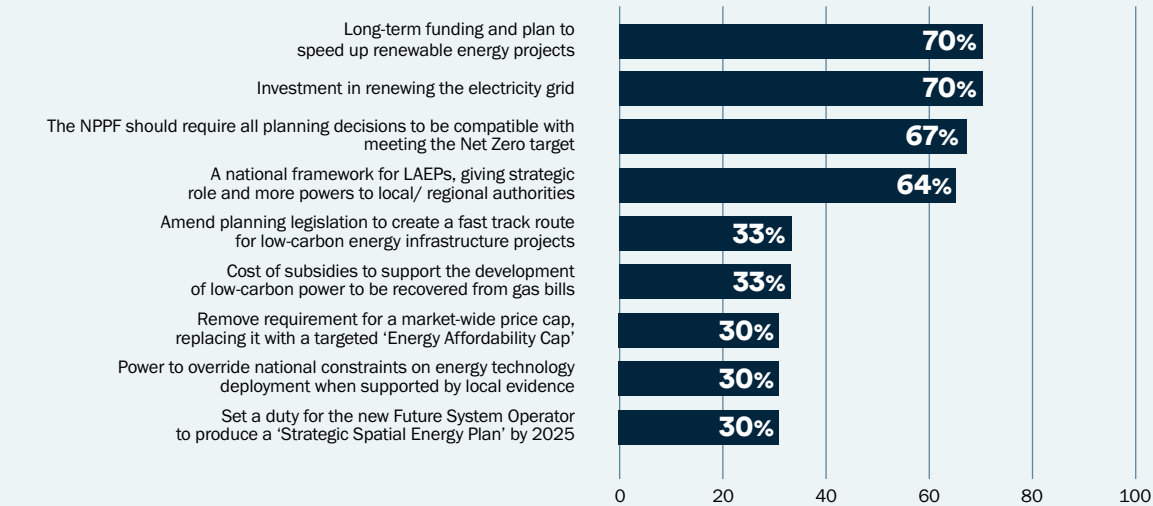
decentralised and place-based energy future. This table below is a snapshot of the policy measures that were deemed to be most important for further discussion by the participants of the research. Each of these measures is explored in detail in the sections below:

Key energy powers to support local authorities		
Measure	Solve / Scale	What would be required?
A national framework for Local Area Energy Planning	Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A national framework for LAEPs with dedicated non-competitive funding, giving a strategic role and more powers to local and regional authorities on energy planning.
Long-term plan and investment in renewable energy projects	Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Great British Energy and the NPPF reforms, should remove planning barriers and budget constraints for renewables to foster sector growth while ensuring that communities remain central to the changes. ■ Allocate funding and a plan for long-term investment to ramp and speed up local, municipal and community renewable energy projects.
National Planning Policy Framework compatible with Climate Change Act	Solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The NPPF should require all planning decisions to be compatible with meeting the Net Zero target. ■ Policy certainty and clear support from government on role of renewables to enable longer term planning and investment in projects. ■ Provide additional technical support and resources to local authorities to handle the increased volume and complexity of renewable energy projects.
Investment in renewing the electricity grid	Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The government should put in place a plan for grid expansion that brings together local authorities, communities and other relevant stakeholders to support this infrastructure development.



The UK must increase the annual offshore wind installations by at least three times

Top energy measures



No. of respondents: 33

Implementing a National Framework for Local Area Energy Planning:

Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) are a data-driven, evidence-based approach to defining the most suitable decarbonisation pathways for the whole energy system for specific local areas, resulting in a spatial plan to deliver that system. These plans, made through consultation with relevant stakeholders including community energy groups and businesses, can then help ensure they are better designed and deliver more effective outcomes.

Analysis shows LAEPs could reduce costs by over two-thirds while almost doubling bill savings compared to one-size-fits-all national plans.¹⁹ However, these do not have a formal place in energy planning at the moment.

GAINING MOMENTUM

LAEPs have gained prominence over the last five years with many local authorities in England and all local authorities in Wales developing plans. Almost half of the local authorities surveyed for this research either already have a LAEP, or are in the process of developing or commissioning one.

The Welsh government has committed to developing LAEPs for all regions

As part of its strategy to reach Net Zero by 2050, the Welsh government has committed to the development of LAEPs for all the regions in Wales, which will be centrally funded but locally-led. They have made LAEP a part of Planning Policy Wales (2024), which outlines how LAEPs interact with planning policy. These LAEPs will then support the development of a National Energy Plan for Wales. In Scotland, local authorities have conducted Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (LHEES), which focus on building decarbonisation.²⁰

However, a comprehensive strategy and framework are lacking for the rest of the UK. This needs to be developed to enable the local creation of LAEPs in the most cost-efficient manner, resulting in actionable strategies and business cases that can be developed by local authorities.

Case Study: *Greater Manchester LAEP*

Greater Manchester has committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2038 and an accompanying science-based carbon budget, driving the development of LAEPs across its 10 boroughs and an overall plan for the city region.

These plans outlined district-specific transformations and strategies for engaging with businesses and residents. Technologies such as thermal insulation, heat pumps, district heating, electric vehicles, and renewable energy sources like solar and wind were assessed to meet these targets. Collaboration across regions, though challenging, brings with it economies of scale.

More details on Greater Manchester's LAEP can be found at <https://gmgreencity.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Manchester-LAEP-Final.pdf>

SUPPORTING REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PLANS

Ofgem is creating Regional Energy Strategic Planners (RESPs) that will be regional divisions under the umbrella of the National Energy System Operator (NESO), responsible for the development of strategic energy plans at a regional level. They will work with local authorities and other local stakeholders to understand the infrastructure needed in different parts and create regional



Solar panels in South Mimms, Potters Bar, Hertfordshire

plans around how local energy systems need to be developed to reach Net Zero. Local authorities will need to share their plans and strategies to make this process as effective as possible. LAEPs can become the foundation for RESPs to develop data-backed, locally-led regional plans. Only one in six councils have developed or are in the process of developing LAEPs²¹ and without a national framework and standardised processes their applicability on a broader scale could become limited.

COST SAVINGS

Several recent analyses on LAEP highlight that it is a potential source of economic efficiency – local areas can save money and make their areas more attractive as investment propositions through the

development of a plan. According to a recent POSTnote, the Energy Systems Catapult predicts that areas with LAEPs could become more attractive for ‘green investment’ and boost green jobs. Fully costed plans with clear responsibilities, developed by stakeholders working together and sharing information, could result in cost savings through preventing duplication of effort.²²

NEED FOR A FRAMEWORK

Over 75% of participants agree that a national framework for LAEP would assist them in the development of their planning for decarbonised, resilient and renewable energy. A national framework for LAEPs which gives a strategic role and more powers to local and regional authorities and which is accompanied with



non-competitive funding and resources for local authorities to develop and implement LAEPs was highlighted as a top five energy policy measure by 60% of local authorities surveyed. Such a national framework would be most helpful if it included details of a clear governance structure, robust technical advice and stakeholder engagement processes.

BROADER SYSTEM CHANGES

Some thought that the shift towards a more locally-focused energy system demonstrates what LAEPs can enhance in the energy network itself whilst also being beneficial to local areas.

There is a change to governance around energy system planning underway – local authorities are much more engaged and have skin in the game, whether it is supply, or heat network development, such measures are well placed to be advanced in our local area energy plan and we can see the benefits of local authorities having a leading role in energy system planning locally.”

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

Local Area Energy Planning is too expensive – it shouldn't be on the councils to fund it.”

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

FINANCING IS AN IMPORTANT NEXT STEP

The benefits of LAEP in terms of better understanding costs and activities were highlighted by many of the study participants.

However, it was clear that how to turn this strategic planning into implementable programmes was an area where more work, funding and guidance are required.

The insights from Cardiff, who have completed their LAEP process, are particularly helpful here.

WORKING WITH DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM OPERATORS

Distribution Network Operators (DNO) own and control the electricity distribution network that connects generators, suppliers, and consumers. Their role is

Wales LAEP - insights from Cardiff

The Welsh government provided funding for each and every local authority in Wales to develop a LAEP. It was an exercise designed to quantify what each area needs and whilst the methodology was imperfect and it was a hugely complex process, the team in Cardiff working on the activity described it as “the closest thing we’ve ever got to understanding what our needs are and the scale of the challenge. And now I can say – this is our shopping list, this is what we need – it really does focus the mind”.

In Cardiff this is 12 solar farms, wind turbines and 250% improvement in grid capacity across the city. To be clear, the LAEP does not represent the council’s current plan. It just helps to clarify that we can meet 30% of our electricity needs

and we need to import the rest from elsewhere. Since every local authority in Wales produced a plan, we now have a whole country jigsaw and the Welsh government can use this to focus their policies and the city region can use it to build an investment portfolio – we can mix the great projects in with the difficult to fund ones.

The Distribution Network Operators have also committed to using the LAEPs in their planning processes too. Having all the people that need to be involved in the process has been helpful – it’s a real key evidence base to move forward on and it’s a really big benefit that each region across Wales has one. Now it needs to translate into a programme – to clarify what we can and can’t do.



The Senedd in Wales (right) has provided funding for every Welsh local authority to develop an LAEP

evolving to include the DSO taking on more of a system operator role at a regional level. Their key focus is to deliver the right capacity, in the right place, at the right time, at the lowest cost for their customers.

Workshop participants flagged that local authorities should be provided with resources to undertake LAEP, working with the Distribution System Operators (DSOs), who could potentially support the development of the plans, and some DSOs have begun this process through creation of relevant teams and development of tools.



***SCALE:** Implement a national framework for LAEPs*

- **A national framework for LAEPs** should be put in place, giving a strategic role and more powers to local and regional authorities on energy planning.
- **Non-competitive funding and resources** should be provided by GB Energy for local authorities so that LAEPs can be developed and implemented, including for significant capacity building within local authorities.

“One of the key areas for us would be having a much clearer role for local government in Local Area Energy Planning. LAEP is currently unfunded and there is no statutory role for local authorities. We are reliant on our relationship with DNOs - we’re a bit ahead of the curve, but this is a really critical statutory area.”

UK100 MEMBER, COUNTY COUNCIL

Driving Renewable Energy Growth:

Net Zero targets cannot be achieved without increasing the share of renewables. More than 50% of the electricity produced is still from fossil fuels which needs to transition to low-carbon sources.²³

This does not even account for the additional energy that will be needed for decarbonising other sectors like heat and transport. Renewable energy capacity needs to increase significantly in the coming decades but there are many challenges that need to be overcome.

Grid capacity constraints and queue for connecting to the grid, which have been detailed in the section above are:

- Securing financing for the projects.
- Barriers faced with the planning system.
- Internal capacity and expertise to develop and execute the projects.
- Ensuring the domestic supply chains can deliver.
- Challenge in developing a workforce equipped to deliver.
- Risks and uncertainty associated with policy changes.
- Getting community buy-in.

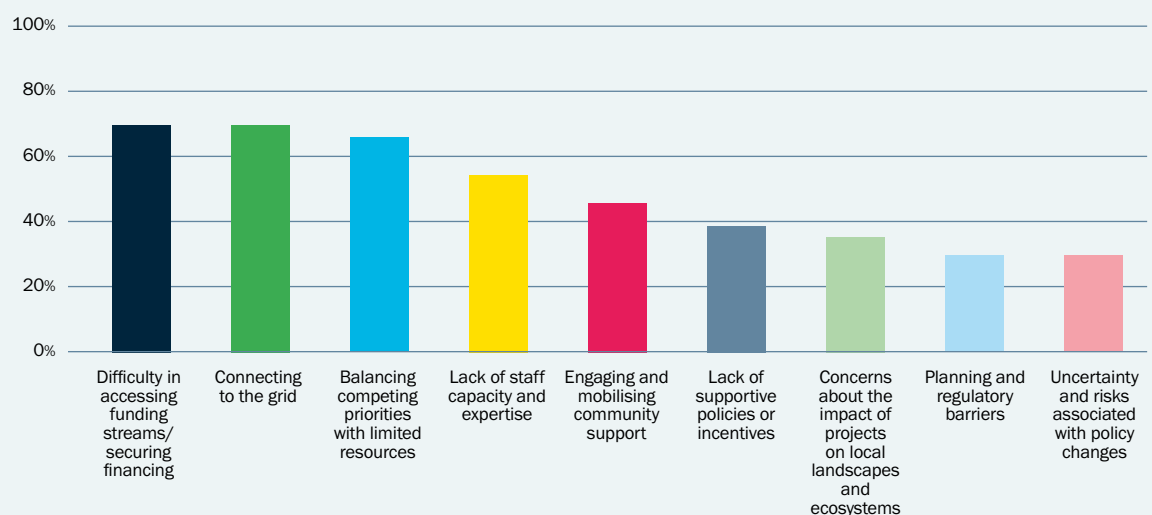
Many of these were echoed by our members through the survey as well.

While progress has been made in some areas such as offshore wind, the lack of growth for others, such as the de-facto ban on onshore wind that was in place, meant slower overall advancement. The new Labour government has showcased its intent to grow the sector through the creation of the Mission Board focused on energy, launching Great British Energy and removing the ban on onshore wind energy. This addresses one challenge and will likely instil confidence in the sector but other challenges remain which can be cross-cutting themes that need the government's focus as well.

ENSURING POLICY AND FUNDING STABILITY

This has been reiterated throughout the process with many interviewees highlighting the uncertainty associated with strategic policy on renewable energy in recent years. This was identified as a critical factor for developing long-term strategies and growing the sector without which they spend time and resources bidding for small funding pots. Allocating funding and a plan for long-term investment to ramp up and speed up renewable energy projects was identified as a

Challenges with rolling out more renewable energy projects



No. of respondents: 33

priority measure for energy policy by 67% of survey participants. The challenge of funding is covered in Chapter 7 as it concerns not just this but other policy areas as well.

“It has to start with a single and long-term funding pot that local authorities have more control over, because that then cascades to enable so much more. It could help us build local supply chains that we need and get away from resources required within local authorities to keep bidding into funding pots. We need to recognise and actively work to pursue the public-private partnership approach. We can’t grant-fund our way through delivery.”
UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

NEED TO FAST-TRACK LOW-CARBON ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Whilst acknowledging the interconnection between this measure and the other energy policy priorities, participants saw that the ability to fast track low-carbon infrastructure projects, through amending relevant planning legislation, was important. It was highlighted as a priority measure in workshop discussions. It was emphasised that fast tracking should not come at the expense of community engagement as the dividends of inclusive involvement – such as stronger community support and better project outcomes – are invaluable.

The NPPF consultation under way²⁴ has proposed changes to the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) regime raising the threshold for projects that would need approval locally. While this might benefit smaller developers, it would increase the load on local authorities who might need guidance and support to manage the increased number of applications.

ENSURING THE RIGHT INCENTIVES ARE IN PLACE

Incentives such as feed-in-tariffs support the development of the sector and need to be considered while making sure they are sustainable. Clear policy signals should

“They are almost the same thing — long-term investment and planning for renewables and fast tracking infrastructure projects. You could draw a mindmap of the interrelations. Essentially this is about whole system change — not about tweaking and business as usual. Business as usual is the problem, not the solution.”
UK100 MEMBER, COUNTY COUNCIL

be provided since uncertainty and back-tracking severely hamper growth. Measures like the cost of subsidies for developing low-carbon power should come from gas bills or through government expenditure. The social and environmental levies on energy bills that fund fuel poverty alleviation schemes and support the development of low-carbon energy are predominantly covered from electricity bills rather than gas bills. With the energy transition, electricity consumption will rise and impact the cost of living for residents under the current system.

“The current price to sell back to the grid is extremely low. There were decent policy reasons for this initially, but the situation has changed and now it’s a huge inhibitor to decentralised energy. Selling back to the grid at a low rate makes the model less economically viable.”
UK100 MEMBER, LONDON BOROUGH

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPLY CHAINS AND SKILLS

None of the above measures will be sufficient on their own unless the supply chains and workforce skills are also equipped to deliver. The shortage of a trained workforce to execute existing programmes has been a significant issue, and this shortage will only worsen with increasing ambitions.²⁵ Taking just the case of the offshore wind industry, the Offshore Wind Industry Council’s Skills Intelligence Report from 2023 estimated the workforce to be around 32,000. This needs to grow to 100,000 by 2030 to achieve the 50GW target of offshore wind energy.²⁶ Even supply chains need to be supported to be able to deliver if the growth targets are to be achieved. In addition, companies are also competing in international markets, many of which provide more certainty and scale.

Supporting community energy projects

Community energy projects can play a critical role in decarbonising the energy system by producing clean, low-carbon energy in addition to other benefits such as promoting energy security, lowering energy costs, stimulating the local economy and getting communities engaged in the decarbonisation journey. However, they currently face significant barriers and the government consulting to understand these and explore solutions is a welcome step.²⁷

Barriers facing community energy projects are:

- **Lack of long-term funding and subsidies:** This creates an uncertain policy and funding ecosystem that impacts the scalability and longevity of these projects. Inconsistency over national funding and strategy has damaged the development of community energy, for example the closure of the Urban Community Energy Fund in 2016 had a significant negative impact on the sector. While the current national Community Energy Fund is a welcome step, it comes after that period of funding uncertainty.
- **Funding from local authorities:** There are developing examples at a regional and local level where community energy investment has created an innovative eco-system. This mechanism can work well since local authorities know their place, needs and community organisations best and understand what projects will help the communities and the overall decarbonisation goals. However, often they lack the means and resources to build this work programme.
- **Complex planning processes:** Navigating the planning system can be complex and time-consuming, often deterring community organisations and

groups from initiating projects. It can also lead to abortive costs if schemes are rejected at the planning application stage.

- **Skills and supply chain:** It is also critical that the supply chain can deliver, which means a significant programme of work so they can support the transition and projects do not struggle to find the right people and materials. Community energy projects can, if delivered well, unlock a local economic and social dividend, including supporting local skills, jobs, apprenticeships and volunteer opportunities.

The most established and developed community energy ecosystems often align with places where regional or local government has been able to offer sustained infrastructure support (a network or officer) and financial support for the development of organisations, groups and projects.

“Investment in smart decentralised energy combined with community ownership is required.”

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

- The Mayor of London and GLA have a long track record of funding community energy schemes²⁸ and have reviewed the impact on carbon reduction and wider delivery benefits.²⁹ The estimates suggest that community energy project could produce enough solar energy for 350,000 homes in London.³⁰
- The Bristol City Leap Community Energy Fund³¹ is supportive for community energy groups that are new and haven't delivered in the past, provides funding for building staff capacity and also projects that deliver for the local community.

- Energise Barnsley is a community-owned energy company working across the Barnsley area. Working closely with Barnsley Council, it aims to achieve low-carbon solutions owned by the community. Barnsley is an area that was once heavily reliant on coal mining; it's now transitioning to a more modern, greener economy and this project focuses on the installation of energy-saving gadgets and a community bond. Most of the community bond members were from the region, and the bond has given a return of 5% for investors. The trial period saw energy bills reduced by 30%.

The right enablers should be in place to help local government grow this sector.

- **Provide sufficient and stable funding streams:** Create dedicated funding streams through grants, low-interest loans, and green bonds specifically for community energy projects. This can help set-up community energy groups, increase capacity, support feasibility studies and initiate projects. Promote innovative financing models and incentives like feed-in-tariffs that provide certainty of returns. Such incentives should be brought back including the ability to sell electricity generated to the local consumers.
- **Support local government initiatives:** Empower local authorities to support community energy projects through

grants, technical assistance, and streamlined local planning processes. Provide them the necessary resources, training and guidance to develop and support local community energy groups.

- **Streamline and simplify planning processes:** Make it easier to get planning permissions and ensure the decision-making is consistent. These can reduce delays and make it easier for community groups to navigate the planning system.
- **Enhance technical support and training:** Provide training and technical support to community energy groups so they can build their own capacity, develop and run programmes with local communities.

“It has to start with a single and long-term funding pot that local authorities have more control over, because that then cascades to enable so much more. It could help us build local supply chains that we need and get away from resources required within local authorities to keep bidding into funding pots. We need to recognise and actively work to pursue the public-private partnership approach. We can't grant-fund our way through delivery.”

UK100 MEMBER,
UNITARY AUTHORITY

“This is a really critical statutory area, it needs greater policy around it but also much more funding devolved to local government to do it well because we can't think about any infrastructure funding now in a locality without thinking about it in a much more integrated context. We absolutely have

to have a regulatory framework. But nobody can agree to standards and that is a core part of a resilient grid. We have to set these standards and then stick to them. We need a national policy on the grid. [...] We'll do everything we can locally, but we still need a national framework.”

UK100 MEMBER, COUNTY COUNCIL



Energise Barnsley is a community-owned energy company working across the Barnsley area

Great British Energy and the NPPF reforms should remove planning barriers and budget constraints for renewables to foster sector growth while ensuring that communities remain central to the changes.

- **Allocate funding and a plan for long-term investment** to ramp and speed up local, municipal and community renewable energy projects.
- Through amending the relevant planning legislation, create a **fast-track route for the delivery of major low-carbon energy infrastructure projects.**
- Develop a **Community Ownership Planning Pathway for new renewable energy infrastructure** so these are owned by ordinary investors and which reinvest profits for local benefit.
- Ensure that **GB Energy is mandated to grow the community and municipal energy sector** with adequate funding allocated to both councils and the community energy sector for developing projects and the system needed to deliver them.
- Provide the power for the **cost of subsidies to support the development of low-carbon power (such as the Contracts for Difference Scheme)** to be recovered from gas bills, or alternatively through general government expenditure.



South Downs,
Surrey

Reforming Energy Planning for Net Zero:

Many members saw the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as an important area of focus and it is encouraging to see the government has launched [a consultation on the NPPF reforms](#).

Planning plays a pivotal role in delivery of infrastructure projects, and to achieve the targets at the pace required this stage needs to be efficient and as straightforward as possible.

Delays and long wait times not only pushback the benefits but also add to costs. Smaller projects go through the local planning systems that have struggled with capacity issues for a decade.

Larger projects classified as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)

go through the Planning Inspectorate. That too is riddled with delays. According to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) the time taken to go through the process has gone up from 2.6 to 4.2 years since 2012. The number of cases going through judicial reviews has also gone up from 10% to 65%.³²

MAKING ALL DECISIONS COMPATIBLE WITH NET ZERO

This was highlighted as an important area to focus attention on, with 67% of survey respondents suggesting requiring all planning decisions be compatible with meeting the Net Zero target.

They also highlighted the need for giving local authorities the power to refuse consent for fossil fuel extraction or carbon intensive



energy infrastructure, as the most important in terms of the material difference it would make to their ability to deliver Net Zero locally. A number of respondents mentioned the current limitations on planning for renewables which are having a detrimental effect.

While the consultation released in August 2024 does recommend giving “significant weight to the benefits associated with renewable and low-carbon energy generation, and proposals’ contribution to meeting a Net Zero future”,³³ it should go further to ensure Net Zero is prioritised in all planning decisions related to energy.

Planning guidance, and the NPPF, are blocking renewables. If the government took the brakes off a lot more things would happen a lot quicker. There are political brakes – talking things down – but also planning system blocks. A presumption in favour of climate action would enable all levels of government to prioritise it, moving from what can we do/what’s convenient to do, to what is necessary to do – that would be a quantum leap.”

UK100 MEMBER, COUNTY COUNCIL

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS, MORE STILL TO DO

It is most encouraging that the new Government sought to lift the limitations on the development of onshore wind as one of their first acts upon reaching office. As highlighted below, this was seen as a significant barrier, but there are still more barriers within planning that need addressing and the presumption in favour of climate action would make a material difference to local authorities’ ability to deliver.

From a Councillor’s perspective, the NPPF should definitely work with the Net Zero target, not without it. We need to be removing barriers so the market can provide. Some of the best wind is on the South Downs and we simply have no ability to utilise that wind – and we’re not allowed to have that debate. A national target or requirement would help solve these tensions. At the moment, we have a very narrow set of options to get energy from where it is generated to where it is needed”

UK100 MEMBER, NON-METROPOLITAN DISTRICT

RECENT RULINGS

In the past month there have been some significant court rulings which will likely be significant for future planning provisions. The Supreme Court hearing on the Horse Hill development ruled that Surrey County Council should have taken into consideration the upstream emissions associated with planned oil wells. This case paved the way for both the Cumbrian coal mine and Biscathorpe oil drilling planning decisions to be overturned a few weeks later. The outcomes of each of these cases lend support to a potential shift away from the approval of fossil fuel extraction and make the case to offer a presumption in favour of climate action in planning policy easier.

SOLVE: NPPF should require all planning decisions to meet Net Zero targets

- The NPPF should require **all planning decisions to be compatible with meeting the Net Zero target**, giving local authorities the power to refuse consent for fossil fuel extraction.
- **Provide additional planning guidance and support for local authorities** to remove planning barriers for projects such as solar panels installations, presuming in favour of these projects, including updated guidance for listed buildings and conservation areas.
- **Provide additional technical support and resources** to local authorities to handle the increased volume and complexity of renewable energy projects.
- **Develop a framework to ensure local communities benefit from renewable energy projects**, such as through local job creation, community investment funds, or reduced energy costs.

Danish onshore renewables

Denmark has established itself as a leader in renewable energy generation over the past three decades. Renewables now account for over 80% of Danish electricity supply, up from just 3% in 1990.³⁴

Yet Denmark has a target of 55% share of renewables across the entire energy mix by 2030, and as a part of the work to realise this goal the government recently announced plans to create 32 energy hubs in local areas all over the country to increase onshore renewable capacity to 1.3% of the total, with 2,5 billion DKK set aside for communities that allow land to be used for onshore wind and solar developments.³⁵



Investment in renewing the electricity grid:

The electricity system has been changing rapidly, with a shift from a one-way distribution to a decentralised two-way flow with increased renewable energy generation. With different sectors being decarbonised, the demand on the grid will rise. According to the National Grid Electricity System Operator (ESO), electricity demand will increase by 64% by 2035 to meet the Net Zero targets:³⁶


- Heating will be decarbonised, thus a shift from gas to electricity which will add to the overall demand. The government target was to install 600,000 heat pumps by 2028 but only 55,000 were sold in 2022.³⁷ The government wants to develop heat network zones and released a consultation that ended in February 2024, which is still being reviewed and analysed.³⁸
- Great British Energy being launched and the barriers to onshore wind being removed signal the government's focus on further building renewable energy capacity including small and medium scale.
- More electric vehicles being sold will need additional electricity for charging. In November 2020, the government set a target of 2030 for the phase out of sales of new fully petrol and diesel cars/vans. In 2023, the phase-out date was changed to 2035. The new government did indicate their ambition to revert to the earlier target of 2030.³⁹ However, what is clear is the additional electricity needed for the charging of cars and vans.

However, the UK has the longest queue to connect to the electricity grid of any country in Europe. Wind farms, solar arrays, and battery projects are stuck in gridlock for up to 15 years.⁴⁰ The current queue of projects could generate 701 Gigawatts (GW) with estimates suggesting it could be as high as 800GW by the end of 2024.⁴¹ While Ofgem

has been taking steps to reduce the wait time through improved connection processes and tracking delivery against milestones removing unrealistic or speculative projects,⁴² the gap still remains.

This research and UK100's Powers in Place report highlight that the current condition of the energy grid is a significant barrier to Local Net Zero delivery. It states that the costs of connections in areas with poor infrastructure can be prohibitive and that as local authorities have not been seen as strategically important, engagement with them by the energy sector has historically been limited.

While more efficient management of the grid and solutions like storage- and demand-side management can reduce the need for grid expansion to some extent, it cannot completely do away with the need for grid expansion. The choice between pylons or underground cables, each with its own advantages and drawbacks, remains a point of debate. However, local authorities, communities and other key stakeholders in the area need to be consulted and be part of the decisions that impact their areas.

 *The grid is a nightmare, doesn't have capacity to take the electricity that we want to generate from our renewables projects."*
UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

The need for grid expansion was confirmed by members' perspectives, across all of the engagement activities undertaken in the research. When asked what energy policy measures would make a material difference to their ability to deliver Net Zero locally, 70% of survey respondents selected investment in renewing the electricity grid to ensure a smart decentralised energy system, plus accompanying regulatory change to maximise the benefits of low-carbon decentralised energy.



More electric vehicles being sold will need additional electricity for charging

LONG WAITS INHIBIT AMBITION

A common concern that many interviewees spoke to was the long timeframes for connecting renewable energy projects, due to current grid constraints, which are inhibiting delivery of their targets. This is a fundamental barrier because in essence the challenges with grid connectivity result in any real progress for local authorities wishing to increase the renewable generation capacity in their areas being stalled.

Estimates suggest as many as 1,600 projects are waiting for connections with about 80 new applications each month.⁴³ This was under the previous government and will likely only grow with the new changes and ambition. These numbers indicate an interest in the sector which is expected to grow further. What is needed now is for the grid to deliver in order to support these ambitious projects and councils.

Grid reforms are planned with the revised approach of 'First Ready, First Connected' which is expected to reduce speculative applications and speed up connections.⁴⁴

However, as per Ofgem while this is welcome, it cannot succeed in achieving its objectives in isolation. Other measures, including a better connection process and delivering on infrastructure growth as needed, will also be critical.⁴⁵

“ There are grid constraints and upgrades are not scheduled until 2038. This has a ripple effect for the council and makes our 2030 target impossible. The grid needs to be able to meet demand.”

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

INTERLINKED TO OTHER NET ZERO GOALS

As sectors decarbonise, more demand will shift to electricity, and grid constraints will likely impact not only energy projects but also housing and transport.

Councils wanting to support the transition to electric vehicles or ensure new housing developments use renewable sources of energy will face barriers when it comes to grid capacity issues. Thus, this one sector

will impact the progress in others as well. The insights from members align with recent insight on grid capacity from Regen – their analysis report on the Local Grid Challenge highlighted that there is spare capacity on local networks.⁴⁶

Thus, there needs to be a significant programme of investment to ensure that electrifying heat and transport in the next decade does not lead to major grid constraints.

6 *Our policy for commissioning or purchasing housing is that it is heated by renewable sources. But to have that, we need developments with air source heat pumps, and doing this has built in a*

massive delay due to a new substation grid update requirements. We need to balance providing homes that are powered from renewable resources and the competing imperative of housing supply.”
UK100 Member, Unitary Authority

California Energy Plan

In 2023, the Californian government introduced California’s Clean Energy Transition Plan.

It outlines how the state will meet the goal of 100% clean electricity by 2045. It details how Electric Resource Planning, overseen by the California Public Utilities Commission, ensures that electric retail sellers procure enough resources to meet their share of forecasted demand.

Through the installation of 12 million smart meters, enabling time varying electric price signals and demand response programmes amongst other measures, the plan is maximising electricity demand flexibility. And the transmission and distribution systems are undergoing significant upgrading and expansion to meet the scale needed by 2045.

A 20-year transmission outlook was produced by the California Independent System Operator in 2022 to explore the

long-term electricity grid requirements and options to meet the 2045 target. In 2023, Governor Gavin Newsom approved the 10-year transition plan which included \$7.3 billion of new investment in the grid.

The government is also streamlining state and local permitting to speed up the delivery of new clean electricity resources. Procurement of storage and diverse clean energy solutions – including geothermal and offshore wind projects – are also included in the plan.

The Tracking Energy Development Task Force meets to review information, identify barriers and supply chain issues and coordinate action across the multiple government agencies responsible for elements of delivery.

Measures to ensure the grid will be resilient to extreme weather events, and new financing models to support investment in the clean energy infrastructure are also outlined in the plan.



The government should put in place a plan for grid expansion that brings together local authorities, communities and other relevant stakeholders to support this infrastructure development.

- **Investment in renewing the electricity grid and simplifying processes** to ensure reduction in connection times for new renewable energy projects.
- **Develop a smart decentralised energy system** that enhances local resilience and integrates renewable sources effectively into the grid.
- Ensure the accompanying regulatory changes maximise the **benefits of low-carbon decentralised energy to local communities** closest to new infrastructure.
- Grid capacity improvements should **prioritise potential distributed generation capacity areas**, particularly in highly-constrained rural areas, alongside the improvements required to meet higher demands.



Transforming Housing and Planning Policy for Net Zero:

This section examines the most important areas to be addressed in housing and planning policy and identifies measures that could be implemented to remove or overcome issues that stand in the way of delivery. The survey took place before the general election and the new government's launch of a comprehensive NPPF consultation.

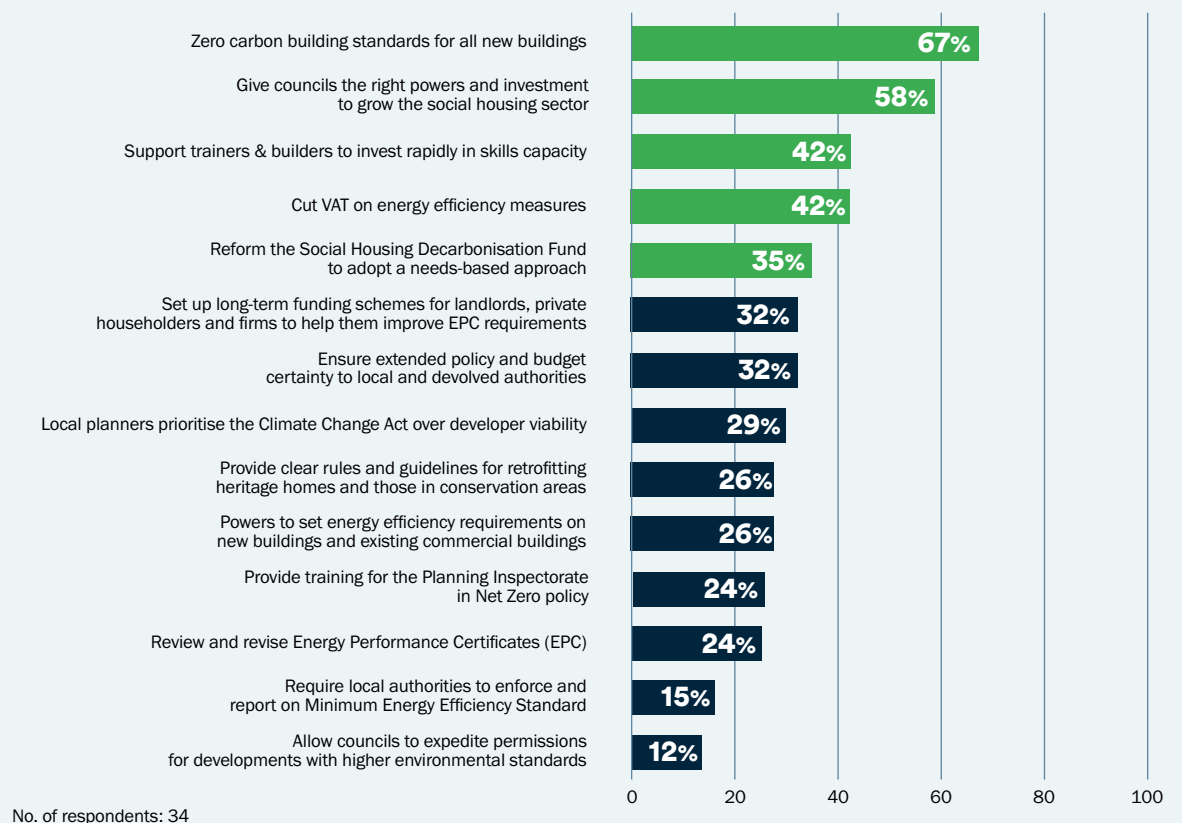
The UK has some of the oldest and leakiest housing stock in western Europe, with buildings accounting for around 17% of the UK's emissions,⁴⁷ making it the second largest source of emissions – so it is a critical area to tackle. This also increases the household's expenditure on energy costs, further exacerbating the Cost of Living crisis. Addressing this will bring down bills and improve people's living conditions. Retrofitting is expensive and cannot be achieved with government funding alone,

attracting private financing will be important as well.

The new government has announced their plans to reform the planning system and give councils mandatory housing targets to deliver 1.5 million homes in the next five years.⁴⁸ UK100's report, Powers in Place, highlighted the two critical areas for local authorities, both with their own sets of challenges – existing buildings that need to be made more energy efficient and resilient, and new builds which are currently being built to standards that would require them to be retrofitted later. Councils and developers striving for higher standards are often thwarted by a confusing system, an absence of strong policy signals and inconsistent national government strategies.

Working together with local authorities, a long list of the housing measures were

Top housing policy priorities




considered, debated and subsequently prioritised. The graph below shows the survey responses but the prioritisation across other activities showed similar results -

Similar to the energy sector, UK100 worked collaboratively with members to prioritise

policy asks which are highlighted in the table below. The subsequent sections go through each of these in detail. Funding is a major barrier and highlighted as an underlying factor for most of the asks across all policy areas, which is being covered separately in Chapter 7.

Key housing powers to support local authorities		
Measure	Solve / Scale	What would be required?
Zero carbon building standards	Solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Introduction of the Future Homes Standard with a zero carbon buildings standard at its core for all homes.
Prioritise the Climate Change Act in planning policy	Solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The National Planning Policy Framework reforms should prioritise Net Zero in planning decisions, and make zero carbon homes the standard.
Sector-wide retrofit	Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reform funding for social housing to be non-competitive and available to all local authorities with their own housing stock ■ Social housing should serve as the catalyst for transforming and scaling the entire retrofit sector
Construction industry training and skills	Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ It should be a strategic priority for Skills England to support the development of the construction industry to deliver Net Zero homes at the scale and quality required. ■ Development of new skills training programmes for low carbon construction co-created with industry.



Zero Carbon Building Standards:

Since buildings are a major source of emissions, it is vital that new builds are constructed with the highest energy efficiency standards in order to be able to reach the legally binding target of Net Zero emissions by 2030. Without this households are not only spending more money to heat their homes, but the government will need even more funding to retrofit them later.

Buildings standards are the minimum enforceable standard of energy performance of buildings at a design stage. Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) can outline the need for development and building standards, provided they align with the national policy landscape and they have been using this over the years to push for better than national standards in the absence of zero carbon standards.

The Labour government has set a target to deliver 1.5 million homes but without there being a national standard to ensure these are zero carbon, money will have to be spent to make them liveable now and retrofitted later. This is unnecessary and self-defeating for the public sector and homeowners alike.

Local authorities that want to future-proof the homes in their area will face significant challenges. It's getting progressively more difficult for local authorities to set higher standards due to a restrictive national policy landscape and higher requirements being viewed as barriers to development. They also deal with conflicting interpretations by the Planning Inspectorate, leading to legal disputes. Despite having the authority under the Planning and Energy Act 2008, policy uncertainty and the lack of national zero-carbon standards have limited their ability to enforce stricter emissions reductions for new builds.

In 2015, the Conservative government withdrew key sustainability policies, including the 2016 carbon-neutral homes target, leaving a policy void. As a result, approximately 1.3 million homes have been

built to lower standards,⁴⁹ which will require retrofitting. The Future Homes Standard, aiming for 75-80% less carbon emissions in new builds, was delayed until 2025. A consultation on this standard, launched in December 2023 and closing in March 2024 and these can reduce as much as 75% of the CO2 emissions as compared to current building standards. **It is critical for the government to review and implement these standards urgently.**

Addressing this now will bring with it co-benefits including reducing consumer bills, developing the allied industries, expanding the green jobs market and working toward energy security.

Thus, zero carbon buildings standards would ensure the new homes and buildings are built to be zero carbon ready, with no foreseeable need for retrofitting.

The Impact of working without Zero Carbon Housing Standards

FRUSTRATION WITH POLICY VACUUM

This particular policy measure is highlighted with degrees of frustration because it is a policy area where formerly there was clarity and strategic direction and an initial goal for all housing to be zero carbon by 2016.

The scrapping of the Code for Sustainable Homes nine years ago, without any replacement, has led to widespread confusion and frustration across local authorities, the communities they serve and those looking to purchase a home.

“ Building industry dictates to the government the lowest standards it can get away with. The lack of a Zero Carbon Homes standard has led to increased gas imports, ultimately paid for by householders.”

UK100 MEMBER, COUNTY COUNCIL

NEW DEVELOPMENT EFFICIENCY

Local leaders require national zero carbon building standards to enable new developments to be as efficient as possible. Without it developers will continue to construct cheaper leaky homes that are more expensive to run and will need to be added to the list of properties that will need upgrading.

In our survey, 67% of the respondents highlighted zero carbon building standards as a priority measure for housing.

LIMITS LOCAL AUTHORITY AMBITION

Without national standards ambitious councils that want to build for the future are held back by national policy inconsistencies and uncertainties. We would solve these issues by having robust national standards which would bring consistency and stability for all stakeholders, with councils not needing to go beyond these to achieve emissions reduction.

Local Planning Authorities (LPA) (District and Unitary Authorities) set the policies that define the need for development and acceptable standards, provided these can be justified within the national policy landscape. LPAs have been using their powers to push for better than national carbon standards in buildings. However, it has become progressively more difficult to demand better standards.⁵⁰

Councils that try to go beyond national standards are either held back by the Planning Inspectorate decisions or get caught up in legal battles. In addition, national government policy was recently changed through a Written Ministerial Statement to prevent local authorities setting standards higher than the national government's.

The Written Ministerial Statement⁵³ was really damaging for us timing wise. It stated that we shouldn't go beyond building regs and our local plan was doing that. This is one place where a U-turn would be good."
UK100 MEMBER,
NON-METROPOLITAN DISTRICT

Case Study: West Oxfordshire

Take Salt Cross in West Oxfordshire as an example. Planning inspectors stated that West Oxfordshire District Council must remove the Net Zero requirements for the development in the local plan, stating that the standards were significantly higher than those required by government policy and that a "more pragmatic approach"⁵⁴ was required than the stated aim of 100% of consumed energy generated by onsite renewables. The High Court confirmed that it would hear the case in the Spring of 2024.

However, on 2 July 2024, it ruled against the campaign group that brought the case but did confirm that local authorities can exceed minimum building regulations.⁵⁵ This clearly remains a matter of some contention and one which requires urgent clarification from the new government.

While this is a win for local authorities being able to implement higher standards, the process is dissuading local authorities from aiming for zero carbon standards.

Maddening that we can't have higher targets for new builds at the moment. We need better government controls for new housing - ideally passivhaus standard."
UK 100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

HOUSING DEMANDS AND SHORTAGES

As per government statistics, the current waiting list for social housing stands at 1.29 million households in March 2023⁵¹, and councils are spending £1.74 billion annually on temporary accommodation.⁵² The urgent need for councils to increase their housing stocks means that currently they are buying

from private developers – so even if they want to prioritise building houses with renewable energy supplies, they need to settle for the available properties which are often gas powered and may not be energy efficient. These competing priorities urgently need reconciling.

NEED FOR CLARITY AND TRANSPARENCY

With clear, overarching Government-led standards, both local authorities and developers would have the clarity they need to build new houses that meet minimum requirements for energy efficiency. This would mean that properties built now will not need to be retrofitted in the short to medium term and which can save money and energy for homeowners from day one

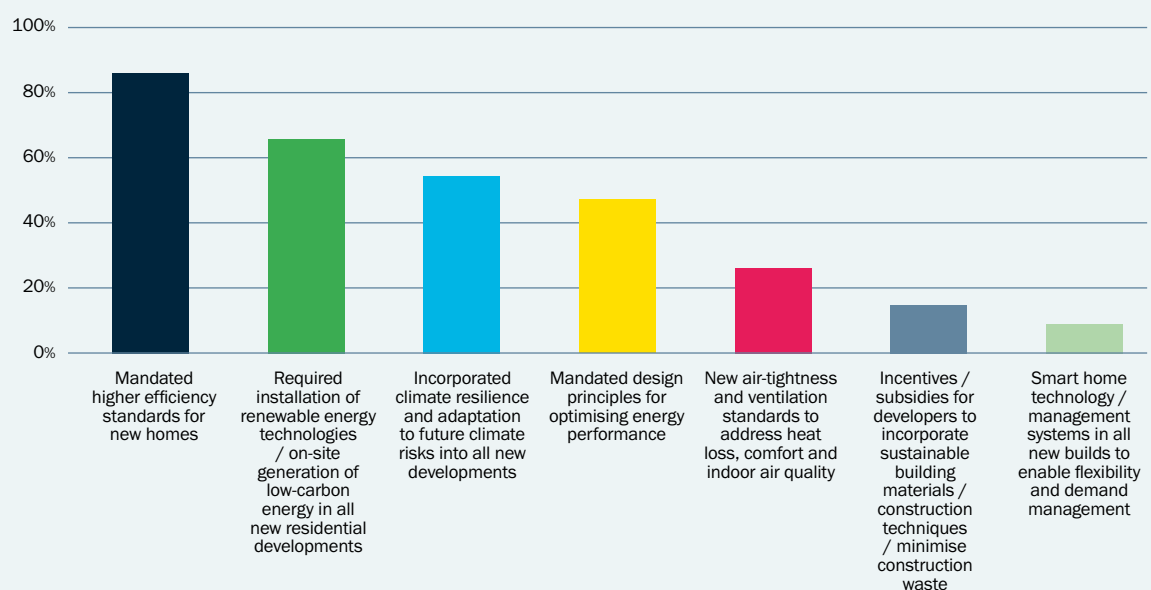
“We need a zero carbon buildings policy – something in writing that we can oblige developers to. Planning works on rules and regulations so unless it’s in writing, we can’t go as far as we’d like.”

UK100 Member, Unitary Authority

and avoid costs in the future for the public sector.

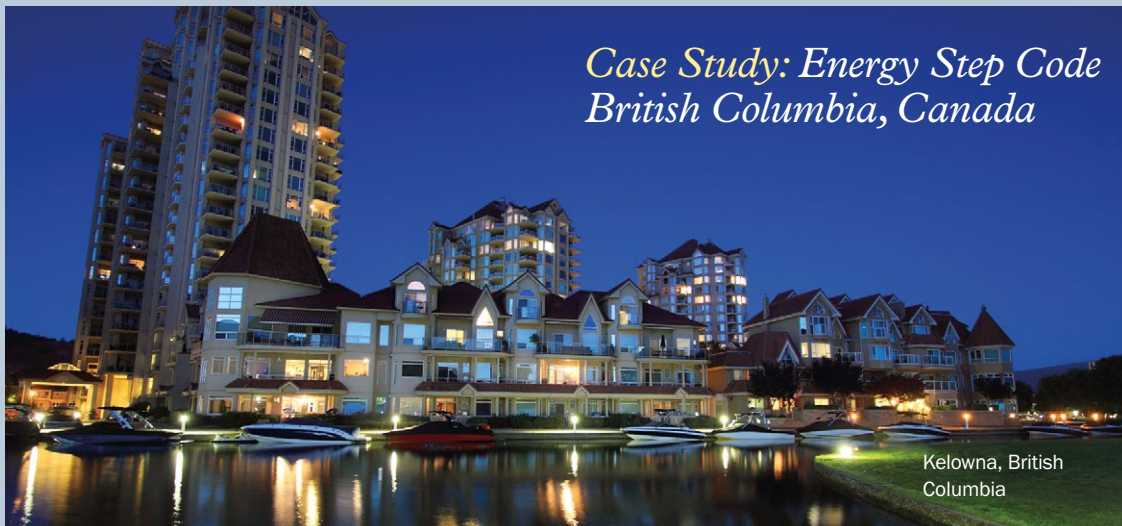
When asked what specific measures should be in the Future Homes Standard, the top ask was **‘mandating higher energy efficiency standards for new homes’** followed by **‘requiring installation of renewable energy technologies/on-site generation of low carbon energy in all new residential developments’**.

The Future Homes Standard should have . . .



No. of respondents: 34





Since 2008, the province has been working with energy efficiency requirements for new buildings. There is the option to follow the ‘prescriptive approach’ in which buildings must meet specific requirements for insulation, windows, furnaces, water heaters, lighting and other equipment and systems, or the ‘performance approach’ – working towards a desired outcome, but leaving it up to particular project teams to decide how to achieve it.

The approach groups performance targets into ‘steps’ for new construction. All authorities having jurisdiction over the BC Building Code – including local governments – can choose to require or

incentivize builders to meet one or more steps of the BC Energy Step Code as an alternative to the code’s prescriptive requirements. In 2017, a Net Zero Step by 2032 was added. In the seven months after the standard first became available to them, 13 local governments referenced the BC Energy Step Code in their policies. And a series of guidance, training and tools have been made available to help support local government integrate the code.⁵⁶ The Canadian government has adopted a similar approach to the development of the National Model Codes, learning from BC. Canada has set a goal that all new buildings will be Net Zero energy ready by 2030.⁵⁷

***SOLVE:** Implement the Future Homes Standard*

The Future Homes Standard should be implemented at the earliest with a zero carbon buildings standard at its core.

- Rapidly introduce **zero carbon building standards** for all new buildings.
- Powers to **set energy efficiency requirements** on existing buildings to support the delivery of a consistent and long-term plan on retrofitting.
- **Requiring installation of renewable energy technologies**/on-site generation of low-carbon energy in all new residential developments.
- **Reform the Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs)** to better reflect the overall energy use and the diversity of the housing stock.
- Councils should also be able to **expedite permissions for developments with higher environmental standards.**

Prioritise Climate Change Act in Planning Policy:

Survey participants were asked which particular elements of Local Net Zero delivery would be unlocked with a better reflection of the Climate Change Act in planning policy. By far the largest change was a clearer and standardised process for zero carbon new buildings.

In the survey, 81% of respondents highlighted that if developers had to adhere to and prioritise Net Zero in new building construction, it would have a material difference. Over half of respondents (56%) saw a requirement for local plans to demonstrate facilitating Net Zero delivery as important. Members felt the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was the best mechanism to deliver on this goal since it sets out the framework for developing local plans and making planning decisions. While there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development at present it does not prioritise the Climate Change Act or Net Zero in planning policy.

POLITICAL WILL

Integrating the Climate Change Act into planning policy – particularly the NPPF – was seen as a seemingly simple development

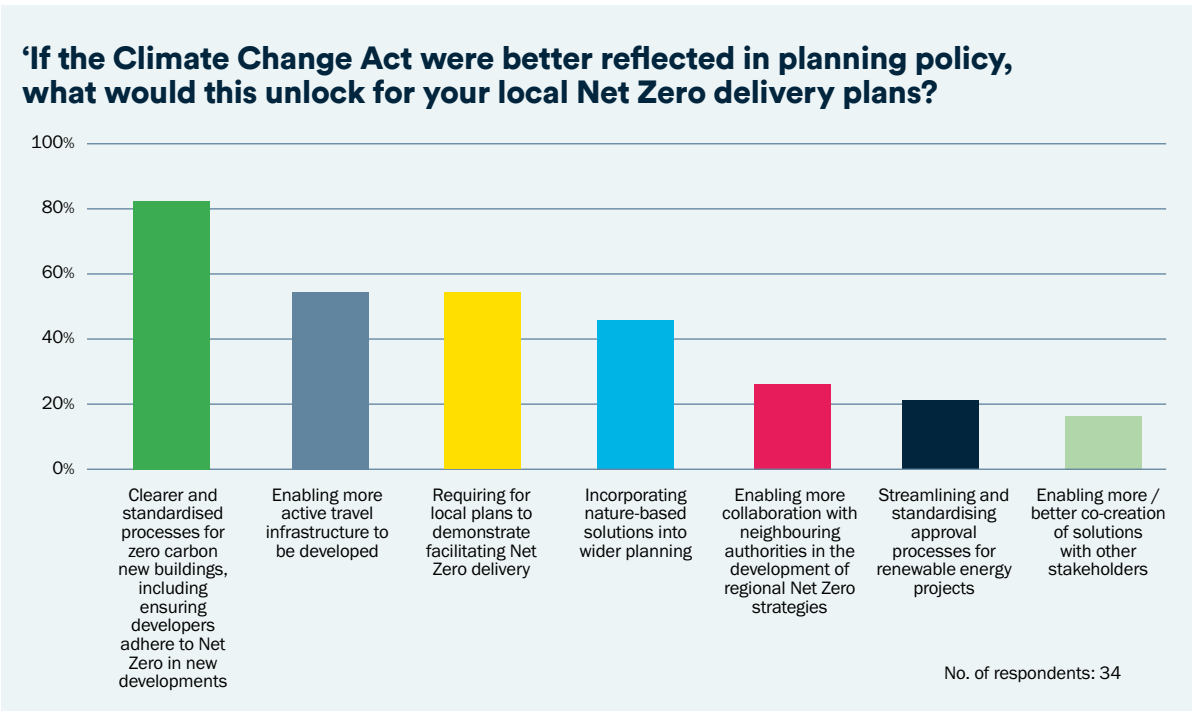
that was both feasible and impactful by members, but was deemed unlikely without significant political will for reform.

At the time of the data collection, there were no reforms being discussed but since then the government has released a consultation on NPPF reforms in August 2024.

This is a welcome step and the insights shared by councils can strengthen this reform process. There is an emphasis on housing targets and easing the planning process.

However, this needs to go further by ensuring Net Zero is at the heart of any planning policy and decision making.

“Planning is a no-brainer, it is sheer stupidity to allow the system to be part of the problem. The NPPF is weak on Net Zero and needs to be massively improved with much greater integration.”
UK100 MEMBER,
NON-METROPOLITAN DISTRICT





CIC-Zero Carbon Park is Hong Kong's first zero carbon building

“As a starting point, we need to have consistent planning policy and a presumption in favour of climate action would be the top thing right across all levels of government.”

UK100 MEMBER,
COUNTY COUNCIL

“Doing something nationally so that developers are constrained wherever they decide to build is important - they are a strong lobby to the government, the new government will have different and greater ambitions, their challenge is going to be placating national house builders.”

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

STANDARDISATION

Several local authority leaders expressed dismay that their own particular application or an application considered by their planning authority failed where comparable other neighbouring applications were granted or decisions overturned on appeal. This was a common occurrence. There is a need for consistency in approach to ensure these perversities are not the determinant between action and stagnation on Net Zero.

But there was agreement that actually changing the facets of the planning process that would enable meaningful progress may be slow to realise. The influence of developers on maintaining the ‘race to the bottom’ on standards, or the status quo was frequently cited.

Permitted Development Rights allow property investors or developers to make improvements or changes to properties without going through the formal planning process.

However, while people should have the freedom to make changes, there should be guidelines and standards for energy efficiency, safety, materials used etc. to ensure any changes are in line with existing regulations and Net Zero goals.

GUIDANCE FOR PLANNING INSPECTORATE

Engaging and educating the Planning Inspectorate was also seen as key to ensuring that planning decision outcomes are more transparent and readily understandable.

More than 35% of the respondents of the survey mentioned that the issue was with the standardisation/interpretation of guidelines on making decisions by the Planning Inspectorate. Issuing guidance to planning personnel that gives due regard to climate change in decision making was seen as a straightforward first step in the process.

When specifically asked what kind of training should be provided, members mentioned training on interpreting Net Zero policies and applying them consistently as well as understanding the evidence base that supports them. *“Climate literacy so Net Zero is put front and centre and current viability isn’t a stumbling block!”*

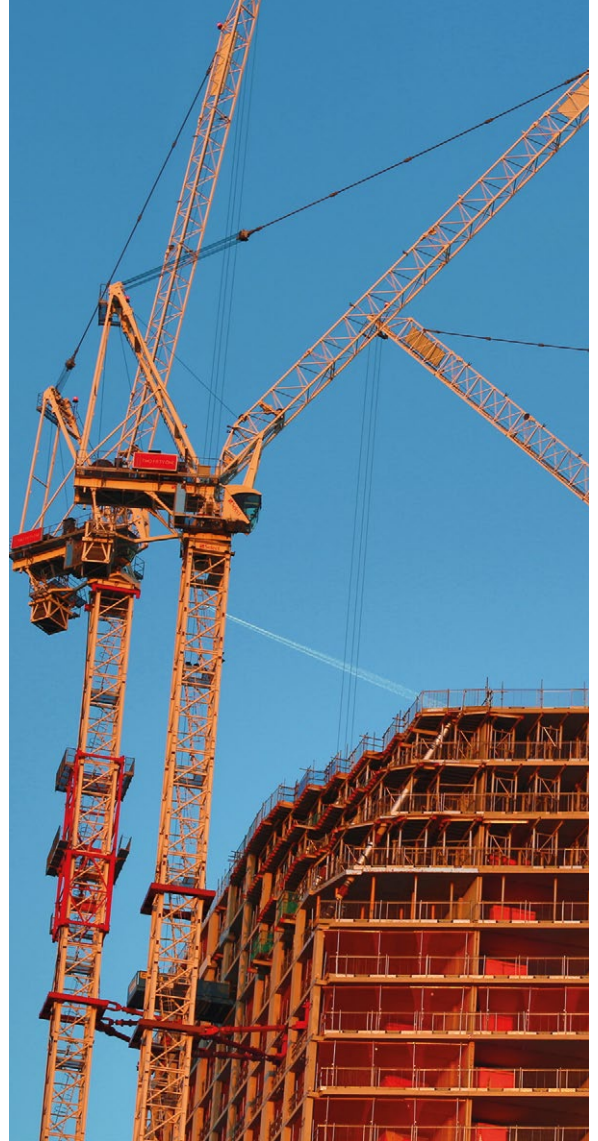
Even though they have put much of the same in their local plan, one council was able to get it through while the other wasn’t. As far as the Officers are concerned, there’s no discernible reason why we should have had a different judgement for here, other than the fact that maybe we just got that Planning Inspector on the wrong side of the bed that day. And just because of that lack of consistency we’re a lot more held back than we would have liked.”

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

Case Study: Bath and North East Somerset Net Zero Planning Policy

In January 2023, B&NES became the first local authority to adopt a local planning policy that goes beyond UK Building Regulations to ensure that new homes are built to Net Zero standards.

The policy includes the ‘embodied’ emissions from construction and maintenance, as well as those associated with heating, powering and cooling buildings day-to-day. The policy includes ambitious energy consumption targets and requires on-site renewable development and includes all developments in the area – residential, municipal and industrial alike.⁵⁸



SOLVE: NPPF should prioritise Net Zero

The NPPF reforms should prioritise Net Zero in planning decisions.

- Empower local planning authorities to prioritise **the Climate Change Act in Planning Policy** over developer viability through the NPPF.
- Provide **training and clarity for the Planning Inspectorate** in climate change and Net Zero buildings and planning policy.
- Ensure **developers prioritise and adhere to Net Zero in new builds.**
- Support **development of local plans that facilitate Net Zero delivery.**

Retrofitting at scale: Local Powers and Finance:

By 2050, 29 million homes will need to be retrofitted, according to the UK Green Building Council.⁵⁹ Estimates for retrofitting costs vary widely, with some reaching as high as £35,000 per property.⁶⁰ Innovative financing approaches coupled with development of business cases would be needed to achieve these targets.

Thus, giving councils the right powers, policy certainty and investment to grow the social housing sector and **deliver a new generation of high quality low-carbon and energy efficient social homes** was identified as a priority measure for 60% of survey respondents.

BROKEN SYSTEM

The current process for supporting the decarbonisation of social housing is both inefficient and insufficient. Analysis suggests that in the last year the top four government schemes only installed 15.8% of the home energy efficiency measures needed by the end of 2023.⁶¹ In addition, the competitive, short-term rounds of funding are resource intensive to apply for and do not reflect the scale of the challenge in terms of the number of properties that need upgrading.

INEFFECTIVE GRANT FUNDING DESIGN

The total funding available is a mix of national funding pots, local council and housing providers' own funds and private investment, however the bulk of the money still comes from the national funding pots.

The current grant funding process and design create challenges for local authorities since they are based on competitive bidding

rather than need, which has various limitations:

- Competitive funding represents a fraction of the total cost required to retrofit the entire stock of social housing. For instance, £957 million has been allocated/spent under Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Wave 1 and 2.1 with a target of 110,000 homes to be completed by March 2025 (around 3 years).
- Hampers long-term strategic planning as councils are working hard to deliver a fraction of the total demand.
- Limits market development as the private sector needs clarity of objectives and long-term certainty. National policy and targets need to provide clear signals to the market.
- Funds like the SHDF have a price cap for the maximum funding per property, requiring councils to meet the gap (for Wave 1, the cap for Band G was £24,000 of which £16,000 could come from the SHDF), and are limited as to the types of measures they instal (they are focused on energy efficiency and not the installation of zero carbon heating). This limits a comprehensive retrofit programme for the home, instead potentially needing more work later on.
- The benchmark remains the Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) which in themselves do not provide a good representation of the carbon performance

6 *With a large portfolio of social housing, we have an insanely low amount of money for things like retrofit. The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund is a very small drop in the bucket. A couple of million here and there with long application processes and then finalising the grant agreement - it's a slow*

and tedious process. And we're working building by building instead of neighbourhoods. We want to see more place-based transformation. And that's a lot of jobs and skills required - and a huge investment, - there is huge market making potential here."
UK100 MEMBER, LONDON BOROUGH

of a building in operation. They have become merely a tick-box exercise based on the presence or absence of building and energy supply elements, rather than how well they perform and are not updated regularly.

With long application and approval processes, the system is not getting to the core of the challenge at either the pace or scale required.

Grant funding should aim to showcase proof-of-concept, support delivery but largely help kick-start the market development process and capitalise on the challenge at hand.

INEFFECTIVE PROCESS OF GRANT FUNDING

Councils spend resources bidding for money which is often a resource intensive task. Estimates suggest local authorities have spent £130 million since 2019 on applying for competitive funding pots which is money that could have gone towards delivery.

For instance, in Cornwall the competitive funding for multiple pots of money has been seen as a real challenge and internal changes to team structures have been taken to try and mitigate this, but the problem endures.

The bidding and administration for getting grants is time consuming and we are having to weave a tapestry to get support across several funding streams. Our ability to go beyond that into efficiency, retrofit and renewables is really limited. Now we've established a single housing programme to join up our approach and better utilise resources."

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

Some local authorities expressed frustration with the current funding pots such as the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

Recipients have highlighted that even after being awarded the grant, operationalising it remains challenging due to the complexities of processing agreements and navigating local procurement procedures.

The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund took months of work, we won it at the end of 2022, and it took months to get grant agreements agreed and is just now getting started. Even after we won the money, we have to go through the council procurement process - and there is uncertainty and lack of experience of decision makers about the new sorts of work in the project."

UK100 MEMBER, LONDON BOROUGH

Others suggested that the provision should not be based on a competitive bidding process, but could potentially be linked to local planning instead, with local authorities developing local plans, including housing associations, with milestones which could unlock the money upon delivery – so either councils complete the work programme and get the funding, or they don't.

ADDRESSING SECTOR-WIDE RETROFIT DEMAND

While local authorities may be directly responsible for the social housing they own, they can play a critical role in implementing and supporting retrofit programmes for housing associations, as well as the private rented and owner-occupier segments.

As trusted convenors of place, local authorities can bring together relevant stakeholders, get community buy-in which is critical, support the development of local skill-building and supply chains as well as coordinate the programme of work. Thus, the social sector should be the starting point, but the wider retrofit programme needs to percolate to other sectors as well. Social housing can showcase successful approaches, and help build economies of scale, and collate demand to bring down prices for the market as a whole. In addition, it needs to test and implement private financing models to deliver not only retrofit targets but also local economic growth and building the green jobs market. Other incentives can include tax deductions and low interest-rate loans. This blueprint of success can then be adapted for other stakeholder groups.

Case Study: *Interest-free loans scheme for home energy efficiency improvements*

Housing is the largest source of CO₂ emissions in Waltham Forest, with 90,000 homes rated EPC C or lower. Waltham Forest's target is for 80% of homes to be upgraded to EPC B level (or equivalent) or higher by 2030. The primary barrier to energy-efficient renovations is cost, with 78% of residents indicating that financial support would encourage improvements.

In response, Waltham Forest Council piloted a scheme offering interest-free loans for home energy efficiency projects, managed by the Energy Saving Trust. This initiative provided expert guidance, including creating the application process, defining criteria and administering loans. They made use of innovative tools such as Homewise, which assesses potential



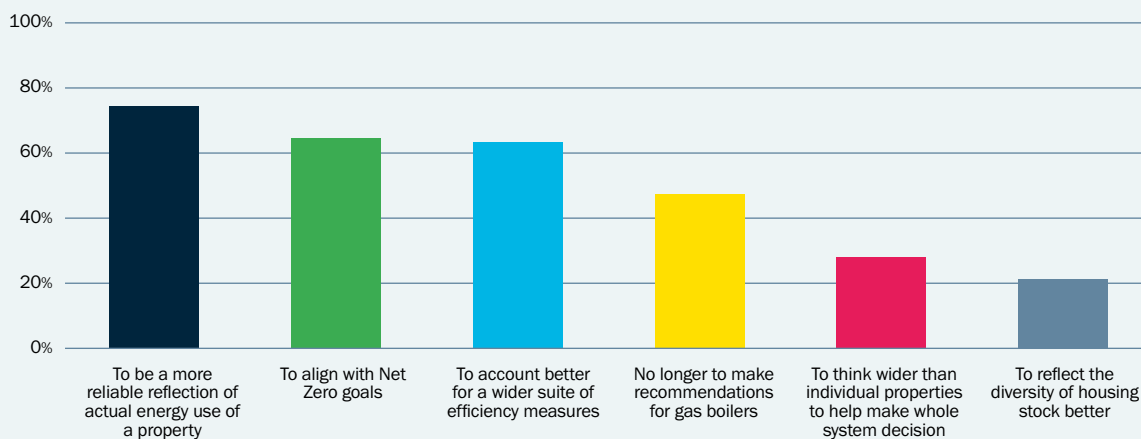
carbon savings and EPC improvements. The project has helped reduce energy consumption and costs for residents, while decreasing carbon emissions in the borough.

Improving Energy Performance Certificates

Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) currently form the basis on which retrofit is actioned. However, EPCs do not provide a good representation of the carbon performance of a building in operation. The production of an EPC is a tick-box exercise based on the presence or absence of building and energy supply elements, rather than how well they perform.

We asked our members how they would like to see EPCs reformed and they said the process should better reflect energy efficiency and the diversity of the housing stock – to remove some of the perversities that the current system bakes in – including, for example, the treatment of heritage properties and the use of gas boilers within the system.

EPCs should be reformed . . .



No. of respondents: 34

Case Study: *West Yorkshire Combined Authority*



As part of their Home Energy West Yorkshire service, homeowners and landlords can avail affordable low interest loans for energy efficiency upgrades to

their homes.⁶² With loan amounts ranging from £5,000 to £25,000, a maximum term of 10 years and a fixed interest rate can support the able-to-pay customers.

Energy efficiency in Germany

ENERGY EFFICIENT MEASURES TAX RELIEF

Since January 2020, the German government has provided tax relief on energy efficiency measures including replacement heating systems, installing new windows and insulating roofs and external walls. Tax payable can be reduced by 20% of the retrofit costs and spread over three years. The support is provided to owner-occupiers and will continue until the end of 2029.⁶³

RETROFIT LOAN SCHEME

Germany developed its energy efficiency programme through the three pillars of clear framework of regulation, ensuring the right information is available to all and support for renewables.⁶⁴ The Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) is a federal German bank that has been

providing loans at reduced concessional interest rates to promote energy savings since the 1970s. This scheme has supported more than 6.5 million homes with energy efficiency improvements since 2006.⁶⁵ Its long-term nature, supported by policy certainty at a national level, favourable terms of the loans and ease of the application process were key to its success.

Loan schemes also exist in other countries such as Canada (Canadian Greener Homes Loan), South Korea (Seoul's Building Retrofit Programme), Belgium (Regional Energy Fund), France (Éco-prêt à taux zero scheme) among others. These also demonstrate how the market can be shaped and developed through national policy without necessarily providing all the financing.

France's recovery and resilience plan

The 2021 RRF Regulation in Europe stipulated that national Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs) should support a green transition through reforms and investments in areas including energy efficiency.

France's RRP includes a regulation promoting the energy efficiency of new buildings and also investment targets for energy efficiency of buildings, renovation of public buildings, private homes and social housing.

The fund allocates 8.3 billion Euros to these measures and a further 1.7 billion

Euros was added from the REPowerEU fund. With the funding, France aims to deliver a 49% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from buildings by 2030 (on 2015 levels). The policies involved in delivering against these targets include a ban on the installation or replacement of oil boilers, implementation of new building standards (the RE2020 legislation), and improving/clarifying renovation incentive scheme eligibility criteria.

Effort is also made to target lower income households in the interventions and to simplify public housing policies more generally.⁶⁶



SCALE: Reform social housing retrofit fund

Reform the social housing retrofit fund to act as a catalyst for the rest of the sector setting the standard for widespread adoption and driving industry-wide reform to meet broader demands.

- The **competitive funding pots should be consolidated and distributed based on need** and speed of delivery.
- The social housing retrofit **grants should help local authorities build and shape the market** for long-term sustainability.

- **Social housing funds should look at whole-house retrofits** rather than short-term solutions. Heating should also be an integrated part of funds like the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.
- The fund should have a **strategy for aggregating demand to bring down costs** in order to enable scale-up and how this can be self-sustaining once the funding ends.
- These funds should be administered alongside UKIB (or other institutions) and seek to **mobilise new finance models to bring in private investments**.

Addressing the Skills Gap in Construction and Retrofit:

Another measure highlighted by members as being critical for local delivery is the need for a coordinated plan for skills and training in the construction and retrofit industry in order to deliver zero carbon homes and retrofit programmes. It was one of the top three policy priorities identified for the housing sector.

When asked what are the barriers that locally-led funding for retrofit could help them resolve, three out of the five top measures were related to the skills and supply chains. The government has showcased the intent to act on this challenge but more needs to be done to achieve the necessary scale. A start has been made through the launch of Skills England to bring together key stakeholders to meet the skills needs of the next decade.⁶⁷

The government has also established the National Wealth Fund to create 650,000 new jobs across the country before the end of the decade. The accompanying Green Prosperity Plan which is set to follow needs to outline what this means specifically for the housing sector skills and job market.

Skills and training opportunity shortages were seen as the barrier that long-term, locally-led funding for retrofit would be most effective in removing or overcoming, with 72% of survey recipients highlighting this measure in particular.

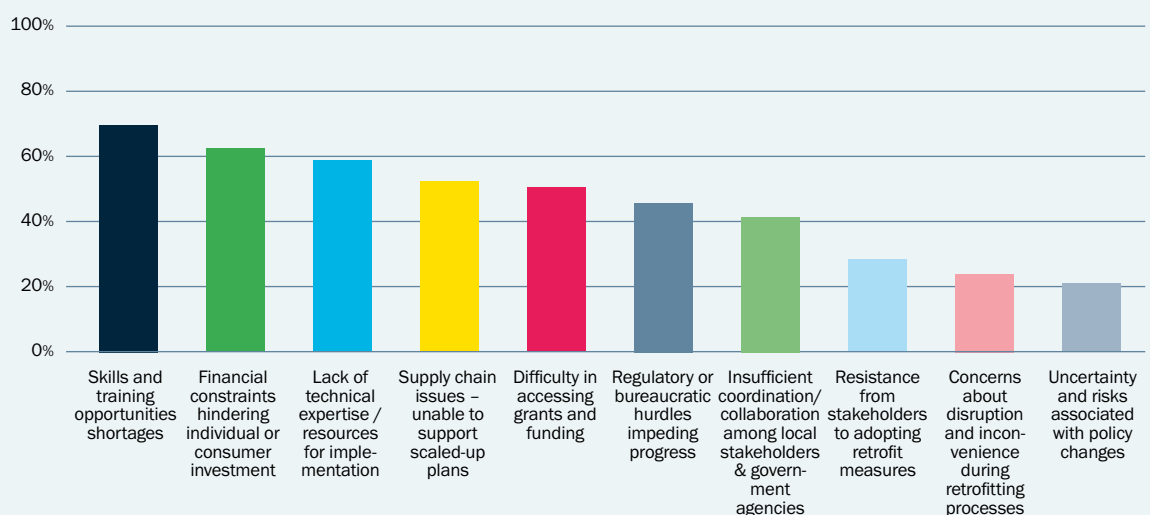
POTENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH BUT BARRIERS HAMPERING DELIVERY

Government research suggests if the investments needed in retrofit are brought in, it would create economic growth and jobs and the UK's building industry could be £6 billion larger by 2030.⁶⁸

PWC estimates that if retrofit scales up between 10,000 and 66,000 new tradespeople will be needed each year.⁶⁹ Thus, this measure has tremendous potential to support economic growth and the creation of green jobs. However, there are challenges that need to be overcome before it can deliver:

- The lack of skills and training are a barrier to delivery
- There is limited trust and reliability of local traders

What barriers could locally led funding help resolve



No. of respondents: 34

- There is low consumer demand for installing energy efficiency measures
- There is no government/industry approved professional standards
- Small firms do not have the time/resources to invest in upskilling their staff
- Lack of standardised courses/training programmes for the industry

In a survey by Federation of Master Builders (FMB), firms were confident in their ability to meet increased demand (42.5% were fairly confident with 25.5% very confident) through upskilling the current team and expanding the workforce. However, there is a lack of accepted suite of standard measures installed which should be backed by the government and accepted by industry.⁷⁰

NEED FOR A NATIONAL STRATEGY AND LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

Many local councils have taken steps to address this skills gap by facilitating projects and collaborative partnerships with employers, education and skills providers and communities. These and other examples are covered in [UK100's skills briefing](#) from 2022. **Greater Manchester** has initiated a scheme to fast-track people into roles in construction and green energy.

The **Mayor of London's** Academy Programme has seen five hubs established across the capital which focus specifically on green skills development.

Essex County Council conducted a Green Skills Infrastructure Review to clearly identify the potential actions and partnership opportunities between the local authority and businesses, training providers, funding bodies and others to best align green skills supply and demand in the county.⁷¹

And **Gloucestershire** has established an authority-wide Retrofit Academy which is helping 'able to pay' householders to access retrofit support. It assists with common barriers to entry including 'knowing where to start' and what is

required for a particular property as well as assurances about trustworthy suppliers.

However, each local authority trying to develop their own solutions from scratch may not be the best use of time and resources. Members have suggested that a national strategy is needed to support the training and skills development of the construction industry. The solutions can then be tailored to cater to local needs. This should be a priority for Skills England.

Support has dwindled over recent years and the responsibility for upskilling or reskilling the workforce for retrofit should not reside with any one entity. The government cannot deliver green skills alone, but the onus should also not be placed on industry and developers.

The national government can provide the right signals to the market through regulations and targets, and create standardised accredited programmes in consultation with relevant stakeholders. They should galvanise the further education sector with financial incentives to train the next generation of professionals for the construction and retrofit industries. The delivery can be through a mix of national, local, developer and academic support to cater to the growing need.

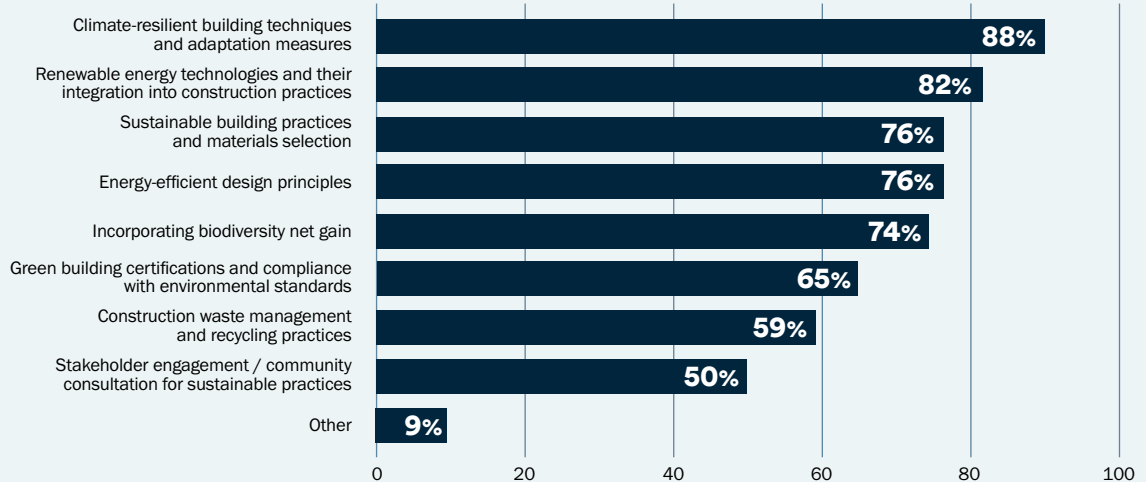
PROVIDING THE RIGHT TRAINING

The scale of the training required should not be underestimated and the skills requirements will not be the same in all areas, for example workers in rural communities will require different training and skills to those in cities. The quality of the work is also a concern, reliability and trust of traders was identified as important by multiple local authority representatives. This becomes critical as ordinary citizens will not know how to select the right person for the job or where to start.

Participants were asked to reflect on which particular skills need addressing – 88% highlighted the need for climate resilient building techniques, 84% stressed the



What specific training about Net Zero do you think the construction industry requires to ensure consistency across local applications?



No. of respondents: 34

importance of integrating renewable energy technologies into construction projects and 78% flagged sustainable building practices and material selection as a priority.

Thus, what is needed is standardisation in training and a method of accreditation to build trust in the system and create a workforce that can cater to the growing demand.

As an upside of the constrained system we find ourselves in is that almost every programme that we undertake involves huge innovation. Some of our programmes have focused on leveraging skills and capacity from within the community. Empowerment and co-ownership with the community is embedded in all we do."

UK100 MEMBER, LONDON BOROUGH

The newly formed Skills England⁷² can play a critical role in bridging this gap. It aims to work with central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions to address this issue, and the retrofit industry should become a key area of focus for them. It should prioritise the construction industry to ensure it can deliver not only the 1.5 million new homes but also retrofit existing homes to ensure these are built to zero carbon standards.

South Australia Cross-Industry Skills Training Project

South Australia's Cross-Industry Skills Training Project engaged the construction industry in producing a series of short courses and training videos on realising better energy efficiency with a range of focal points, including new buildings and renovations.

It is managed through the National Energy Efficient Buildings Project (NEEBP) by the South Australian Government and delivered on behalf of the former Council

of Australian Government's Energy Council.⁷³ The project – in collaboration with the Green Building Institute – brought leading experts in sustainable construction to train and mentor industry representatives one-on-one and developed a repository of knowledge and ideas focused on practical solutions to ensure access to a wider audience. A green building diploma was embedded into apprenticeships, but content is also available as individual units.⁷⁴



***SCALE:** Develop training for building industry*

It should be a strategic priority for Skills England to support the development of the construction industry to deliver Net Zero homes at the scale and quality required.

- A **national framework identifying the wide range of skills for Net Zero** and potential careers providing information on how employers can sponsor training and reskilling.
- **Local authority funding settlements that reward greener approaches** in areas such as sustainable procurement so that services commissioned by the council start to shape the local economy. Similar to Community Wealth Building approaches.
- Provide sufficient **investment to enable further education institution providers** to fund Net Zero training programmes.
- **Government support for training ‘trainers’.**
- **Improved data on skills and labour market analysis** that identifies the current and future skills needs of each locality.
- Local authority investment in Net Zero projects to provide **assurances to local businesses of potential supply chain and demand for skills.**



***UK100 drafted an insight briefing on Skills for Local Net Zero Delivery and detailed recommendations can be found [here](#)**

7

Addressing Core Obstacles to Local Net Zero Success: Funding, Duties, and Collaboration:

The insights from members across the research revealed a number of other overarching issues that are severely impacting their ability to deliver Net Zero locally. These were **funding and finance**, the **lack of a Net Zero statutory duty** for

local authorities, a **lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities between local and national government** and a lack of collaboration and cooperation. These issues will be explored in further detail below.

Maximising Impact – Optimising Available Funding for Greater Results:

Limited funding and resources was seen as the biggest barrier to delivering Net Zero ambitions locally by 94% of survey respondents (94%).

Funding is raised time and again as a barrier to development. It is estimated that around £50-60 billion funding is needed each year to achieve Net Zero targets.⁷⁵

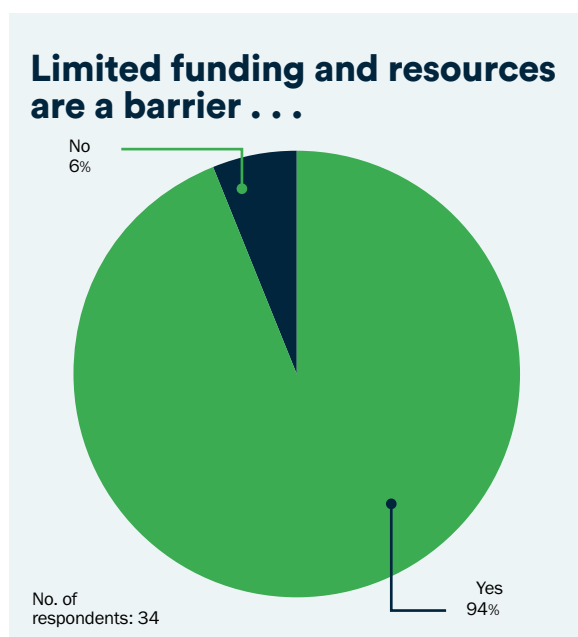
This cannot come from national funding and private finance will be critical to achieve these figures. However, national funding

should serve as a catalyst to attract private investment by maximising the impact of existing resources, rather than anticipating it to increase to £50 billion. This can be achieved through reforming the funding landscape and developing strategies for creating investable projects.

Councils are currently moving from one project to the next without a comprehensive long-term strategy due to unclear funding.

However, they believe that with long-term funding certainty, they could make a significant impact by focusing on developing and implementing enduring plans, reducing uncertainty and risks, building local supply chains, and providing stability for businesses.

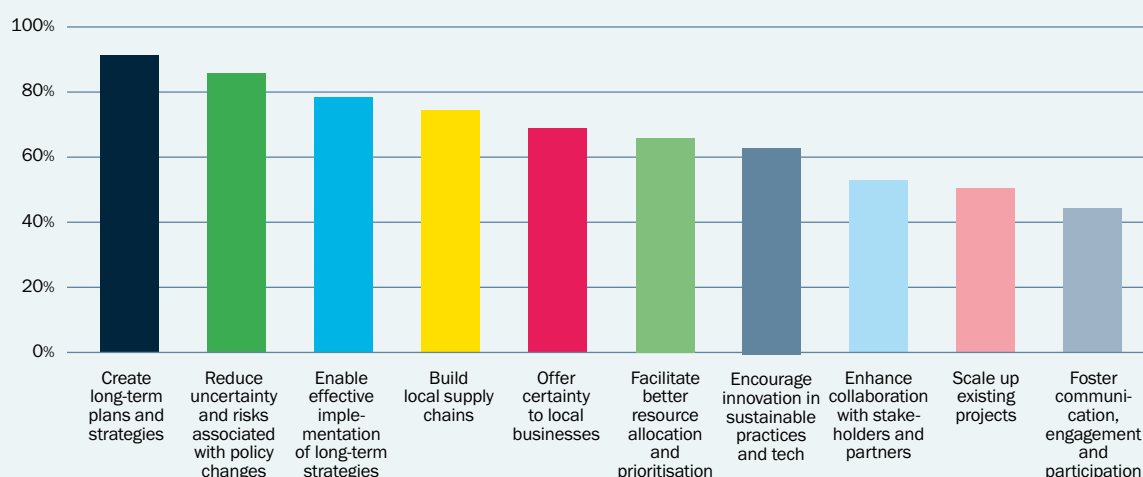
This piecemeal approach is also impacting the ability to deliver place-based projects and blended finance.



“The short-term nature of funding and the rules around how it can be deployed haven’t been supportive. We need longer term funding to drive the supply chain.”

UK100 MEMBER, COUNTY COUNCIL

Long-term budget and policy certainty can help . . .



No. of respondents: 34

The following are some of the key steps needed to address the funding challenge:

COMPETITIVE FUNDING

Competitive funding pots are the way most government funding is distributed currently but has significant issues which have been highlighted by local authorities.

- Councils spend time and resources working on proposals to get grants, which are often unsuccessful. Some even need to hire external consultants to write their bids which can be expensive for a small council with limited resources to start with.
- It is not a level playing field, as some councils are more experienced and adept, having successfully submitted and won multiple bids in the past.
- Councils can only achieve short-term objectives, it does not allow them to plan for the long-term.
- It partially supports their local targets but offers no certainty for meeting the remaining goals. A single project, while beneficial, does not create sector-wide change or initiate a broader ripple effect that benefits the wider community.
- There is limited ability to support market development or scale-up solutions.

“Levelling up funding is a case in point. We spent a lot of time and money and we didn’t get anything. This has to be a nationwide programme to roll out everywhere. Takes a lot of time to fill the forms and get sign off. We spend a lot of money on consultants to make sure our packs are compliant with government asks.”
UK100 MEMBER,
NON-METROPOLITAN DISTRICT

When asked specifically about the issues with funding for Local Net Zero, 85% of participants said they couldn’t reliably predict where funding streams would be available for Local Net Zero delivery. Only 6% of local authorities thought that obtaining central government grants was straightforward – 94% of local authorities disagreed, with significant uncertainty about why funding applications fail. Less than 10% of local authority respondents were clear about why projects do not get funding.

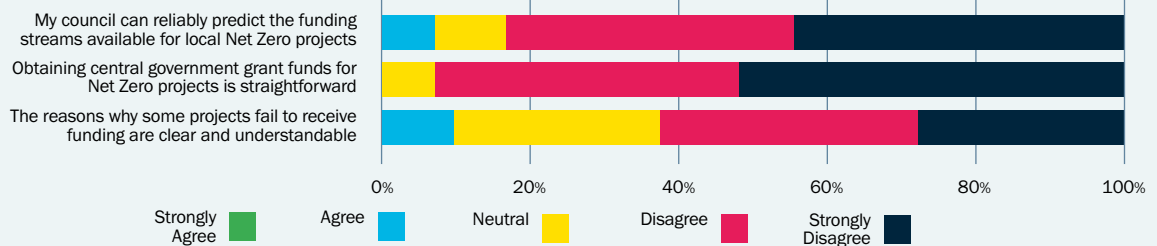
“We’re exploring through our devolution conversations how funding is allocated from the government into housing retrofit. There are multiple pots and they are all short term. And the formulas used to allocate funds are challenging for rural areas. This fragmentation, the short term allocation of pots and the inequalities in funding formulas make it challenging for us to deliver our whole programme of work.”

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

“A lot of projects suffered from delays. Particularly around retrofit. Timescales don’t fit with the ability to deliver. These all add to the feeling of pushing boulders up hills and not feeling supported. Whilst it is great to have money, there is nothing to help us invest.”

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

Funding for local authorities



No. of respondents: 34

◀ A quarter of local authorities surveyed about funding applications had had no success in securing funding at all across multiple applications. Just three local authorities were successful in all applications for funding that they had submitted. Because of the piecemeal and fragmented funding landscape and often convoluted application processes, 50% of respondents didn’t answer the question: What was the total value of all the applications? How much time/staff resources were spent on applying for these funds?

Only 17 councils responded, out of which 11 could provide some concrete details on the topic. For those that could provide details, it is clear that significant staff resources are dedicated to application processes, with at least a full time equivalent role dedicated exclusively to funding proposals, but often

this figure is 2-3 FTEs with no guarantees of success for any application.

CONSOLIDATING EXISTING POTS

There was overwhelming support for consolidating the many funding pots that local authorities must compete for to create a more efficient system, better able to deliver results. Instead of short-term pots resulting in one-off pilots, or standalone projects, funding could be better deployed to build and grow the sector and help to develop markets and remove uncertainties about where the next lot of money is coming from.

ATTRACTING PRIVATE FINANCE

Short-term competitive funding pots do not enable supply chains and the market to develop, grow and become self-sustaining, leaving local authorities to continue to bid for one pot after another. Providing a basis for long-term policy certainty would enable private funding and financing to enter the market and create more opportunities to blend public and private finance. Alongside incentives to build the sector it can also offer assurances and they should endure long enough for the market to mature – many references were made in the research to

“Competitive funding is an issue, we spend a lot of time on applications, we don’t have big teams of people working on them and then we don’t get the funding, there’s a real unfairness in being pitted against each other.”

UK100 MEMBER, NON-METROPOLITAN DISTRICT

the ending of energy feed-in-tariffs, as an example of the removal of support before the renewable energy market had had a chance to develop sufficiently.

Private investors are looking to invest in 'green' projects but need clarity, certainty and scale to be able to fill that gap.

Clarity: Businesses and patient private finance invest when they see potential for a strong return and need clear, stable long-term objectives from the government. The government needs to provide that clarity of long-term objectives, thus not back-tracking on policies and targets.

Certainty: Policy certainty and stability is absolutely critical for the private sector to invest in setting up operations or developing new solutions. Without this, investors will be unwilling to back any proposals. Government targets and regulation are another means to provide clear market signals and as we reference above the previous government sent mixed signals in recent years.

Scale: Private investors need projects to be of sufficient scale to make their involvement worthwhile. This can be a single project or overall demand within the sector. Again, government signals can provide the impetus for them to be able to plan their investment strategy.

FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVES

There were several references to positive framing made by research participants – about how action to address Net Zero needs to be seen as an opportunity, not as something that wastes time, effort and money.

We try to stress the positive - our actions are not just about reducing emissions, but highlighting that the council is at the forefront of new technology with a huge opportunity to lead the world - and we should be taking the opportunity whilst it's still there. [Our council] generates income from solar farms, it is not wasting money on them."

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

Investment could help us build local supply chains that we need and get away from resources required within the local authority to keep bidding in to funding pots, we recognise this and are actively working to pursue the public private partnership approach. We can't grant-fund our way through delivery, so we seek to create a baseload of finance to strengthen opportunities to partner with the private sector."

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

There are also issues around how the restructuring of local government and devolution needs to be done sensitively to ensure hard work, progress and momentum are not lost in this area.

As the new government embarks on a new round of devolution, learning these lessons will be important if delivery is to be maintained.

We've been hit with two challenging issues - firstly consolidating five councils into one has been massively challenging. We had loads going on before including additional planning guidance as well. When we're in a financial crisis it's clear that Net Zero gets knocked down the pecking order. Net Zero needs to be a higher priority with funding and a statutory duty to do that. It's mad that we are competing for money for projects."

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY



Statutory Duty and devolution of power:

A lack of a statutory duty for Net Zero was identified as a barrier by 75% of participants.

With funding cuts over the years, councils are forced to make hard decisions in terms of work programmes to support and build. The ones with a statutory duty associated with it get prioritised over others. Net Zero not linked to a statutory mandate can leave ambitious councils in a precarious position of wanting to support the transition without the means to do so.

There are estimated to be over 1,300 statutory duties and responsibilities that councils provide.⁷⁶ Hence, merely adding another duty to the mix may not be a solution in itself. What councils want is the ability to prioritise and integrate climate action comprehensively within their local strategies, ensuring they have the necessary resources and support to achieve meaningful and sustainable results.

Almost 50% of the respondents stated they did not believe that they have sufficient authority and decision making powers to effectively pursue their climate mitigation goals, and 73% disagreed that the former government's devolution deal adequately considers climate change. Only 21% of participants thought that there are clear ways

for local authorities to work with the national government on delivering against their climate ambitions. The survey found 88% would welcome a statutory duty for climate change if it came with the necessary powers and funding.

“The lack of any legal duty and associated powers for local authorities to compel organisations to act on climate change means that much of our work is focused on facilitating change with local communities and stakeholders, rather than having the powers to require stakeholders to act. However, as acknowledged in the Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget these levers alone will not be enough for local authorities to deliver our Net Zero ambitions due to a lack of power to implement holistic approaches alongside other challenges such as funding and capability. [...] Providing local authorities with a legal duty and associated powers on decarbonisation would accelerate local action.”

UK100 MEMBER, LONDON BOROUGH

Parameters of a statutory duty

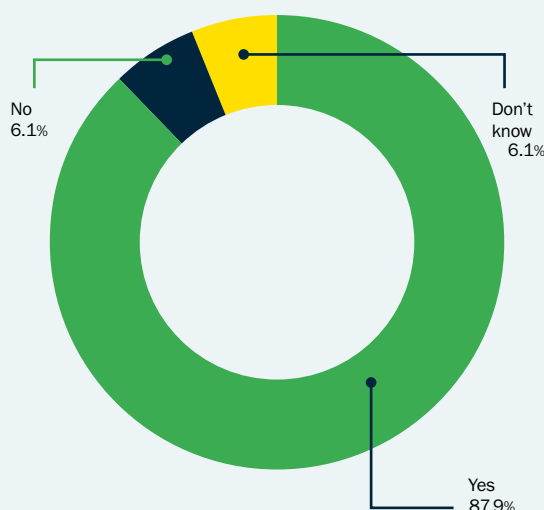
SUFFICIENT RESOURCES TO DELIVER

It was very clear from the perspectives of the membership gleaned in the interview process that any statutory duty must be met with sufficient resources to deliver against these expectations. Below are some of the issues highlighted by UK100 members – both political leaders and officers alike – which demonstrate this clearly:

“No statutory role for local government is a real issue. But it would need to be accompanied by funding. Lead local climate authorities would need clear, ring-fenced funding and scaled up officer time on the back of the funding. We also need a statutory duty for adaptation, we're even further adrift on this than mitigation. We need to start now and fast.”

UK100 MEMBER, COUNTY COUNCIL

Would you welcome an overarching statutory climate change duty if it came with the necessary powers and funding?



“A statutory duty would have to come with a serious additional burdens fund. Personally, if we had a statutory Net Zero duty I would feel more secure in my job right now. We’ve needed to find £300k savings this year, and climate is still a political priority, so I’m fortunate in this sense, but once they’ve cut everything they can, with climate being non-statutory, it’s on that side of the board.”
UK100 MEMBER, COUNTY COUNCIL

“But we’d need to know what was statutory about it, just to report, or to report and reduce? Staffing would be key whatever it was. And we’d need to be clear about what conditions would be placed on such a duty.”
UK100 MEMBER,
NON-METROPOLITAN DISTRICT

“The statutory requirement has to be a strict one, if it’s quite a lax one then people would say ‘oh we’ve done this, that’s good enough’. It’s got to be hard and firm to actually make real change.”
UK 100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

Some participants highlighted other examples where statutory duties are impractical to fulfil due to the lack of resources provided for their implementation – adult social care, child services, food waste and street trees have been mentioned in the context of an expectation to deliver, with very limited or no resources at all to manage these.

CLARITY OF SCOPE

Several local authorities emphasised that there would need to be real clarity about the parameters of a statutory duty and what was in scope and not – whether it covered reporting emissions, or also the reduction of emissions – as well as the conditions that would be placed on such a duty.

Others have highlighted that the statutory duty would need to have sufficient ‘teeth’ to ensure it is effective.

Member Insight: Statutory Duty

By requiring councils to pursue Net Zero, this obligation would help the UK meet its national target of achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

Responding to public demand: With growing public concern about climate change, a duty would demonstrate that the government recognises the multi-level action needed and responds to the demands of citizens.

Ensuring consistency: A statutory duty would require all councils to work towards net zero emissions, ensuring a consistent approach across the country.

Providing a clear mandate: A legal requirement would give councils a clear mandate to prioritise climate action and allocate resources accordingly.

Accelerating progress: By making Net Zero a legal obligation councils would be compelled to act more quickly and decisively to reduce emissions.

Encouraging long-term planning: A statutory duty would encourage councils to develop long-term strategies for achieving Net Zero, rather than often having to prioritise short-term initiatives.

Enhancing accountability: With a legal requirement in place, councils would be more accountable to their constituents and the government for net zero progress.

Facilitating collaboration: A shared legal duty could foster greater collaboration between councils allowing them to share best practice and work together on regional initiatives.



A lack of a statutory duty for Net Zero was identified as a barrier by 75% of participants in our survey

CAREFUL FRAMING

There was a degree of nervousness amongst some of the members in terms of a statutory duty being seen as a race to the bottom, rather than something to drive progress and ambition.

It was clear that without a duty, action would continue to be a struggle at the pace and scale required, but that the framing of any duty needs to be carefully considered,

I'm reluctant about a duty on local authorities to deliver Net Zero, but if we don't have it other things will get priority - so I do see the benefits. It would need to come with adequate resources - give us the tools to do the job."

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

and needs to be adopted into a landscape where the onus isn't solely placed on local authorities, reflecting that there are some areas where local authorities alone cannot deliver.

I feel uncomfortable [about a statutory duty] without resources to deliver. We're currently in a massive battle around fairer funding anyway for a rural area. Whilst not trying to decry the merit of the ambition, the issue is that a statutory duty could put a burden on local authority that it was unable to deliver. Local authorities should be able to move at their own pace with this. Within wider national targets, there may be some scope. But I'm wary of anything being made statutory without seeing small print."

UK100 MEMBER, UNITARY AUTHORITY

National-Local Delivery Framework:

Our survey found 84% would favour a Local Net Zero Authority to coordinate priorities between national and local government. Such a body would establish clear roles and responsibilities, provide guidance and assess performance.

A Local Net Zero Delivery Authority to coordinate Net Zero priorities between national and local government would establish roles and responsibilities between them, provide guidance and assess performance, thereby cutting through bureaucratic barriers, driving efficiency and innovation, creating the opportunity for true feedback and learning, and delivering national and international Net Zero commitments – faster, better and cheaper.

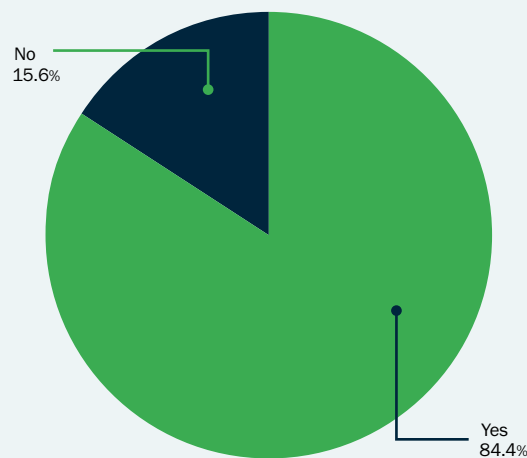
The proposed Local Net Zero Delivery Authority would also unlock private investment and improve accountability in departments and local authorities to accelerate the UK's Net Zero transition drastically.

By coordinating government and business on policy priorities and investment timelines, the UK could crowd in private investment by fostering certainty and long-term planning.

UK100's report 'National – Local Net Zero Delivery Framework'⁷⁷ offers detailed insights.

In addition, the new government's commitment to significant reform would benefit from a body dedicated to coordinating feedback from local government and identifying barriers to delivery, helping to navigate potentially difficult political decisions. The Authority could ensure that Local Net Zero funding is allocated to areas of greatest need and that public funds spent on achieving Net Zero provide value for money, serving both economic and environmental interests.

To deliver your ambitions more effectively in collaboration with the national government, would you welcome a Local Net Zero Authority?



It would allow for national ambition with local accountability, ensuring the UK government and the tiers below work in tandem to deliver Net Zero goals faster, better and cheaper.

Some things are best dealt with as a national policy - national standards, for example, drive supply chains. I'm all in favour of locally-led policy, but the dearth of national policy is not supporting us and some areas don't have capacity even if they have the will. So give it to us locally and we'll do everything we can, but we still need a national framework for where we are to deliver."
UK100 MEMBER, COUNTY COUNCIL

GUIDANCE AND TOOLS

Under the new government, local authorities will receive additional funding to support the Missions. However, all local authorities are not at the same point in their journey to Net Zero.

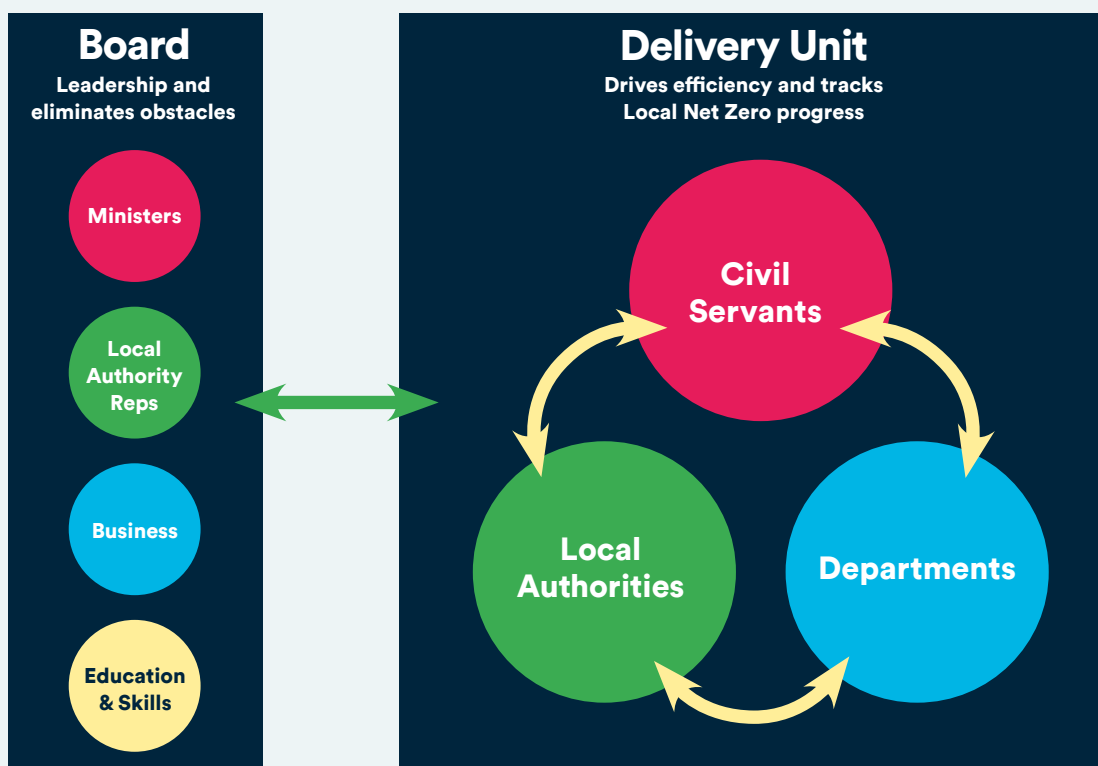
Often they are reinventing the wheel, developing solutions that may already have been tested elsewhere. Thus, what they need is a set of tools and solutions that can support their local delivery. It does not need to be prescriptive but rather showcase good practice examples and solutions local authorities can adapt and deploy in their region.

Place-based approaches have been highlighted as significant for many years, by many leading researchers, experts and decision makers. Action on the ground is best, closest to the people and implemented by those that know and understand local contexts. But within this delivery there is a

real need to acknowledge that every place is different and has its own challenges and strengths. This is why there is a need for broad national guidance that can be interpreted in ways that can maximise the strengths of specific local contexts, and work to overcome the particular challenges.

Local Net Zero Delivery Authority

An executive agency with two clear components - an executive body (the board) that coordinates priorities and responsibilities, and a delivery arm (unit) to coordinate Net Zero priorities between local and national government



The establishment of such an Authority would address multiple challenges, unlock several key advantages and increase accountability:

- Currently, there is no central body to monitor Local Net Zero progress and delivery – it is a series of siloed efforts across multiple parts of the national and local state.
- With a lack of national guidelines, Local Net Zero efforts vary greatly, with some councils leading while others lag behind, and climate action

is being deprioritised due to budget constraints.

- Departments announce competitive funding programmes with different requirements and timelines that could be used for Net Zero. This has the twin effect of fostering wastefulness and scaring off private investment by creating uncertainty.
- Leveraging local leaders' knowledge and community sentiment to craft location-specific solutions would drive economic growth throughout the UK.

Public Engagement:

Public engagement was an issue that ran through many of the insights given across the research. There is a real want to shift away from one-way, limited consultations, towards deep and inclusive engagement, whereby local authorities can co-create their policies and initiatives with the people that will be served by and benefit from them.

One of the primary drivers behind locally-led delivery is that local authorities understand and can cater for their residents and businesses – but this starts with a real dialogue and involvement in setting the course. As was highlighted, all too often communities have “had stuff done to them” and this needs to change.

Net Zero is not just about the solutions and the money, it is also about achieving the right outcomes, ensuring the benefits are delivered to the communities and these are justly distributed.

It means ensuring the communications can manage any misinformation or disinformation and is able to convey the benefits.

“The nuts and bolts, bread and butter challenge that we have on a daily basis is bringing people along and justifying investment in programmes. People who respond to consultations usually do so because they are activated to respond – they are angry. But there is no support for diverse, multi-lingual, cultural communities. And we need to bring all communities in to and have them drive conversations and make adaptations based on feedback.”

UK100 MEMBER, LONDON BOROUGH

Survey respondents were asked that if they had more resources for public engagement, what would they use it for. The common strand was being able to co-create solutions and develop more deliberative engagement. Methods like citizen assemblies and juries were most often cited, along with community engagement activities and campaigns, and more targeted communications.

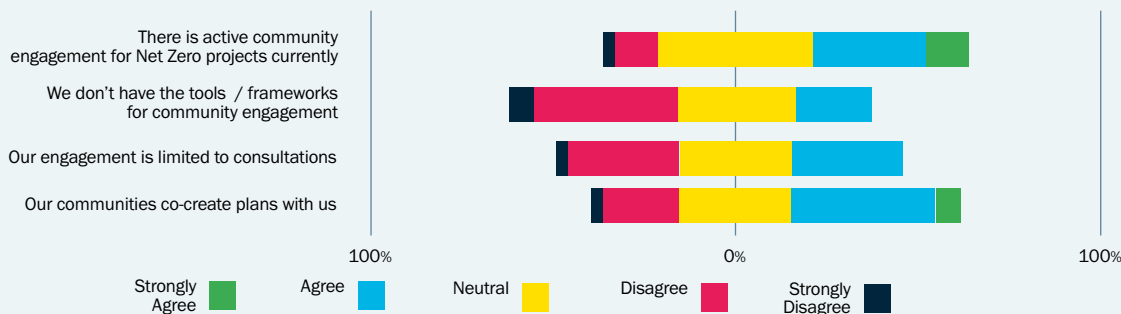
Additionally, some more specific ideas include street/single property engagement, targeting engagement with particular age demographics or going “beyond the usual voices”, as well as using social media. Providing carbon literacy training, instigating support hubs and setting up Community Action Groups were also highlighted.

Over a third of local authorities agree that their public engagement is limited to consultations currently, with only 40% agreeing that communities co-create plans.

“We need to have creative ways to engage with people and have positive things that spark joy and make people happy in the context of difficult situations.”

UK100 MEMBER,
NON-METROPOLITAN DISTRICT

Public engagement on Net Zero



No. of respondents: 34



Members indicated that more could be done to maximise the outreach and involvement of people in places but they do face barriers including limited expertise and resources, the labour-intensive nature of engagement and the prioritisation of other work over engagement.

Some local authorities were clear that there has been real value in their efforts to engage on particular issues but that more support is required to enable them to do more engagement and to do it in a more considered way. This involves dedicating more resources to the area, building skills and provisions within local authorities, and sharing insights and developing toolkits.

Cornwall received funding from the then Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to make the development of a LAEP, a co-production process involving communities, households, businesses and other stakeholders.

They set up a representative sample of 50 residents that would meet to discuss and recommend solutions. Other methods included were community roadshows, youth-focused engagement sessions and events for businesses to understand more, get answers and share recommendations.⁷⁸

Members felt that with the rising mis/disinformation campaigns around Net Zero, it is even more important to better engage with the public. Local authorities also face the brunt of the campaigns being the first layer of government for citizens but struggle due to limited time, resources and expertise.

“Government needs to create scaffolding around it to do it [engagement] properly. It is a cornerstone of democracy but there are so few tools to do it. Local authorities get the flack on controversial programmes for not engaging well and deeply enough due to lack of capacity and skills.”

UK100 MEMBER, LONDON BOROUGH

Some local authorities have one climate officer and no support, but incredibly engaged decision makers. Others have dedicated teams and are able to mobilise, be responsive and go further and faster. Some have a housing stock, some have been involved in several pilot projects, some meet with significant community challenges.

Understanding this diversity in starting point and ability to deliver must be central to devising appropriate responses.

Recommendations:

8

Overarching



Ensure long term policy and budget certainty for local authorities, businesses and other key stakeholders empowering them to strategically plan and invest for the long term in line with national targets and goals.



Reform local authority funding away from short-term competitive pots towards multi-year place-based grants to enable long-term planning, delivery and drawing in private investment.



Establish a cross-departmental Local Net Zero Delivery Authority, to coordinate delivery, define roles, provide feedback on spending mechanisms and ensure local authorities' statutory role in the transition.



Develop a statutory Net Zero or climate duty for local authorities to take action to contribute to achieving the UK's climate change targets.



Ensure community engagement in place-based climate programmes by supporting local authority-led deliberative processes and launching a national advice and information programme to support the transition.

Energy

SOLVE: The NPPF should require all planning decisions to be compatible with meeting the Net Zero target

SCALE: Great British Energy and the NPPF reforms, should remove planning barriers and budget constraints for renewables to foster sector growth while ensuring that communities remain central to the changes.

SCALE: Implement a national framework for LAEPs giving a strategic role and more powers to local and regional authorities on energy planning.

SCALE: The government should put in place a plan for grid expansion that brings together local authorities, communities and other relevant stakeholders to support this infrastructure development.

SOLVE: The Future Homes Standard should be implemented at the earliest with a zero carbon buildings standard at its core, removing the need for new homes to be retrofitted at a later date.

SCALE: Reform the social housing retrofit funds to act as a catalyst for the rest of the sector setting the standard for widespread adoption and driving industry-wide reform to meet broader demands.

Homes

SCALE: It should be a strategic priority for Skills England to support the development of the construction industry to deliver Net Zero homes at the scale and quality required.

SOLVE: Reform the National Planning Policy Framework to prioritise Net Zero in planning decisions.

Acknowledgments:

Participating Local Authorities

We would like to thank the elected leaders and officers from the following local authorities who participated in the research and shared their valuable insights.

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Cheshire East Council
Chorley Council
City of York Council
Cornwall Council
Cotswold District Council
Cumberland Council
Essex County Council
Gloucester City Council
Gloucestershire County Council
Hampshire County Council
Hertfordshire County Council
Lancaster City Council

Lewes District Council
London Borough of Hackney
London Borough of Haringey
London Borough of Lambeth
London Borough of Newham
London Borough of Sutton
Manchester City Council
Mid Suffolk District Council
North Kesteven District Council
North Norfolk District Council
North Somerset Council
North Tyneside Council
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Oxford City Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Rother District Council
Somerset Council
South Gloucestershire Council
Southampton City Council
Stroud District Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Watford Borough Council
West Midlands Combined Authority
West Northamptonshire Council
West Suffolk Council
Westminster City Council
Wiltshire Council
Woking Borough Council
Worthing Borough Council

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