LocalGovernmentLawyer

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Towards Net Zero

Are councils winning the fight against climate change?

Read the results of our exclusive research

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Summary and key findings

*This report considers the state of decarbonisation at the local level in 2026. Centred around the results of a survey conducted by **Local Government Lawyer** and **Ashfords**, it details the projects and schemes councils are most likely to pursue, how successful those efforts have been, and where the challenges lie. It also draws on in-depth interviews with senior councillors, officers, lawyers, consultancies and campaigners.*

- **Electric vehicle infrastructure is the most common council decarbonisation programme**, with two-thirds of respondents reporting work to expand charging networks.
- Many councils have embedded climate action into decision-making, but **relatively few describe climate considerations as a crucial factor across all decisions**.
- **Support exists for stronger legal obligations**, with the majority of respondents backing the introduction of a statutory duty on councils to work towards net zero.
- Council **fleet electrification and improving the energy efficiency of council buildings are also among the most widespread decarbonisation schemes**.
- **Funding remains the single biggest barrier to reducing council carbon emissions**, with respondents overwhelmingly identifying greater financial support as the factor that would most accelerate progress.
- **In-house skills and organisational capacity are also inhibiting delivery**, particularly in authorities without dedicated climate expertise.
- **Legal teams remain largely advisory rather than strategic**, with only a small minority of respondents saying legal departments help plan and formulate decarbonisation efforts.
- **High-achieving councils are increasingly reliant on innovative funding models** and commercial partnerships to unlock large-scale investment in decarbonisation.
- Political **support for decarbonisation is becoming increasingly uneven**, creating a widening gap between councils accelerating climate action and those scaling back their ambitions.

Methodology

We surveyed 226 council lawyers and other relevant officers in an effort to better understand the targets councils have set, the measures they are using to reduce carbon emissions, and where the challenges and opportunities lie. We then conducted interviews with eight leading voices in the sector to further understand the results.

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A changing climate: How councils are tackling decarbonisation

Eight years after councils began declaring climate emergencies, decarbonisation remains a priority across local government, but progress is increasingly constrained by funding pressures, skills shortages and political uncertainty. Adam Carey, in association with Ashfords, looks at whether councils can maintain momentum towards net zero.

In 2018, Bristol City Council became the first UK local authority to declare a climate emergency, warning global temperatures could rise by 1.5°C by 2050 without urgent action. The declaration led the council to implement the first ever climate action plan – triggering a series of policies, strategies and infrastructure projects aimed at reducing the city's carbon footprint.

Within a year, most UK councils had followed suit, and momentum built in Westminster too. In 2019, MPs voted to declare a climate emergency, making the UK Parliament the first in the world to do so. Shortly afterwards, the UK Government legislated for net zero emissions by 2050, prompting more than 300 local authorities to adopt their own targets. Many councils set ambitious net zero targets of 2030.

The period was defined by urgency and political consensus around decarbonisation. But eight years on, that consensus looks less stable, with exclusive survey results from *Local Government Lawyer* showing that climate considerations across council decision-making are still rarely considered "crucial" in practice.

The research – conducted in association with Ashfords – reveals a mixed bag for decarbonisation in 2026: one defined less by ambitious targets and declarations, and more by the practical limitations around funding, in-house skills and the absence of statutory obligations.

The results also raise the question of whether efforts to realise net zero at the local level are running out of road – something that would represent a significant blow to national efforts to cut emissions, given councils account for more than 30% of emissions by some estimates.

Jonathan Croley, a partner at Ashfords who advises local authorities on the legal issues relating to energy and decarbonisation projects, commented: "Most councils know what they want to achieve. The hard part is turning ambition into something practical and deliverable – the right funding, the right delivery model, the right structure. Early advice helps authorities identify how the project will be funded, understand the conditions attached to that funding model, and build a project that's realistic to deliver and bankable, not just one that looks good on paper."

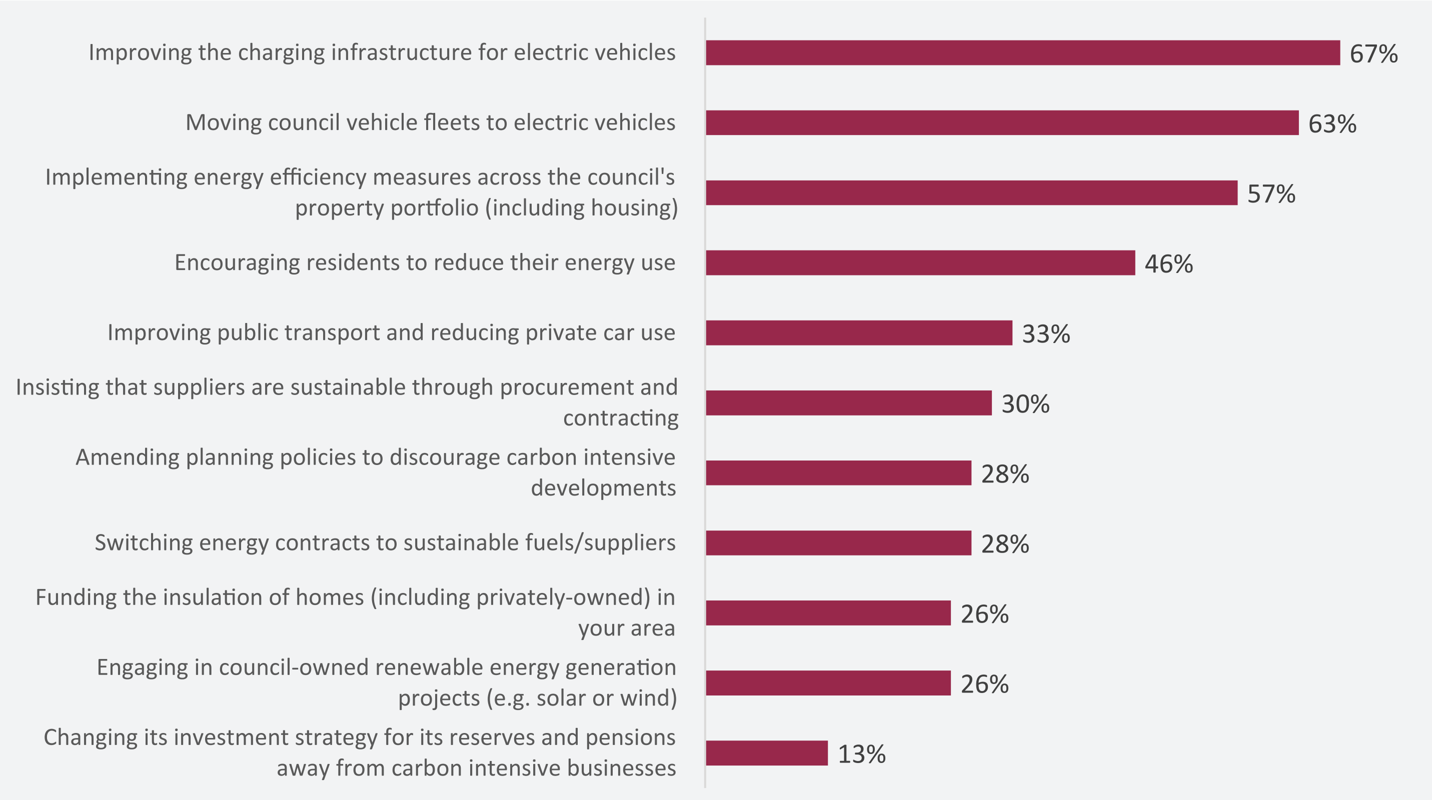

Figure 1: Which are the main policies that your council is adopting to reduce its carbon emissions? (Tick all that apply)

What are councils doing right now?

There are levers that councils can pull to decrease their footprint (and the footprint of their residents) in almost every service they deliver. These include transport and highways policy, public housing, planning and development control, waste and recycling, public buildings, street lighting, fleet management, procurement, local energy generation, heat networks, biodiversity and land use, air quality management, flood resilience, economic development, public health, and influencing private-sector and household behaviour through local partnerships and place-shaping powers.

So which of these routes towards decarbonisation are councils following today?

According to the survey, electric vehicle programmes dominate current-day council efforts, with 67% of respondents reporting that their local authority is working to improve public charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs) (see Figure 1).

The second-most popular approach is converting council fleets to EVs, which was listed by 63% of respondents. The focus on EVs is partly explained by a healthy stream of funding from central government, which announced £4bn in EV investments in June 2025 – alongside £300m to roll out charging points across the UK.

But EVs and their associated infrastructure are not without their challenges – and even trailblazing councils like Bristol are struggling to fully decarbonise their council fleet.

> *"The strongest projects are often those that reduce emissions while creating a clear financial benefit."*

According to Bristol City Council, which was ranked as the lead city council for decarbonisation by Climate Emergency UK – a campaign group which compiles performance data on council decarbonisation efforts – in 2025, just 20% of its vehicles are electric.

Speaking to *Local Government Lawyer*, the chair of the council's Environment and Sustainability Committee, Abi Finch, says transitioning the fleet is "proving somewhat challenging for a variety of reasons – and partly it's about the infrastructure for charging those vehicles".

She highlights waste and recycling vehicles, which require specialist charging points, as a particularly thorny problem.

According to Cllr Finch, the city council will have to relocate a depot in order to address this barrier. The council's interim solution is to buy vehicles which can be converted into electric power down the line, she adds.

These problems are not exclusive to Bristol. In fact, just a quarter (27%) of councils have 10% or more of their council fleet – which covers all kinds of vehicles, not just buses – as electric vehicles, according to data from Climate Emergency UK published in November 2025. The organisation's report also noted that only 3% of councils have more than half of their fleet running on electricity.

Oxfordshire County Council, which operates many bus routes throughout the county, has successfully transitioned its bus fleet to electric. But larger, more specialised vehicles are proving harder to replace. The county is another highly regarded local authority on emissions reduction, having been ranked as the top-performing county council by Climate Emergency UK last year.

Cllr Judy Roberts, who stepped down from her position as Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action in May this year, says the council cannot completely transition its fleet, partly due to the inability to source electric-powered fire engines. "If [they] did exist, it would be quite difficult to find charging for," she adds, "and so we are running a pilot hydrogen-run fire appliance."

Image: Bolstering charging infrastructure for electric vehicles proved the most popular decarbonisation measure in the survey.

Quick wins?

While electrifying fleets remains a priority, councils are also pursuing measures that can deliver quicker returns. The survey found that councils are focusing on electric vehicles, improving the energy efficiency of their properties and encouraging residents to reduce their energy use. Our qualitative research also suggests that switching street lighting over to LED remains a popular approach among high-performing authorities.

What makes these switchovers so enticing is the promise of financial savings alongside a considerable reduction in emissions. A rare combination.

In Bristol, the council invested £12m in an LED street lighting upgrade, which Cllr Finch says was a “quick win in terms of making a huge impact on emissions”. The council has previously reported that the new lights will consume approximately 30 to 40 per cent of the power required by traditional light sources, while reducing costs in the longer term.

Bristol’s Innovation and Sustainability Manager, Alex Minshull, tells us that the case for street lighting “is a simple cost one”, adding: “It pays back very quickly, and will save the council a lot of money.”

But the switchover has also provided the city with additional functionality, allowing lights to be dimmed and brightened, which can aid emergency response services, he adds.

Cllr Roberts echoes this, describing Oxfordshire’s LED programme as a “massive win” that provided a surprisingly large reduction in emissions.

Croley says projects such as LED upgrades demonstrate how decarbonisation can lead to financial savings: challenging the common narrative that net zero equates to cost.

“The strongest projects are often those that reduce emissions while creating a clear financial benefit. Those projects tend to be easier to justify, fund and deliver.”

Councils primarily fund LED lighting programmes through an invest-to-save model (which involves an upfront cost in return for future savings), with some reporting that switching has reduced energy consumption by around 60%. Those cost savings mean that local authorities actually lose money by delaying a switchover. Yet for councils further along the decarbonisation journey, many of the easiest gains have already been made.

Oxfordshire County Council’s experience with fleet electrification is emblematic of this dilemma. Cllr Roberts says: “We are fully aware, with our next five-year framework, that a lot of that early stuff is now being done. So

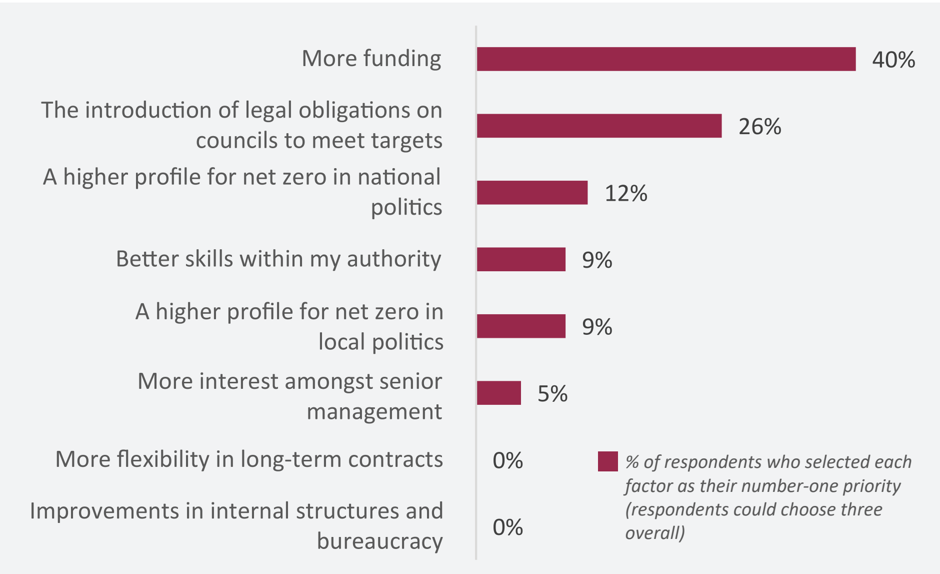

Figure 2: What of the following factors would most assist your authority’s net zero aims?

Image: LED lighting schemes offer a quick win that can save councils money and carbon.

a lot of the more difficult stuff is left. Things like retrofit, which we all know is probably the biggest challenge."

Despite those difficulties, councils are embracing efforts to retrofit their properties. According to the survey, 57% of respondents said their council is implementing energy efficiency measures across the council's property portfolio, including housing, as one of their main approaches to reducing their carbon footprint.

This covers a range of measures, including establishing low-carbon heat networks, and installing solar panels or battery storage systems across a council's property portfolio.

Twenty-six per cent of respondents meanwhile reported that their local authority is funding the insulation of homes, including privately-owned homes.

But unlike LED lighting or other invest-to-save projects, retrofit programmes often involve a complex mix of planning, financial and technological challenges. As councils exhaust the quickest and most cost-effective routes to reducing emissions, they are increasingly being forced to confront these more difficult barriers.

The question is no longer whether local authorities are committed to decarbonisation. Rather, it is how they can continue making progress once the easy wins have been exhausted.

Creative solutions

Decarbonisation programmes, for the most part, come at great cost – and the measures that remain for many authorities are often the most difficult, and the most expensive.

Forty per cent of respondents listed 'more funding' as the top factor that would most assist their authority in achieving their net zero aims (see Figure 2).

The financial challenges are heady – and there is no better place to illustrate this than in Manchester, where the combined authority says the city region will need £64bn of investment in order to meet its carbon neutrality target in 2038.

"Any local authority can achieve its net zero ambition, but only if it can lever in third-party finance."

The vast majority of this investment will need to come from the private sector – with £52bn of this sum to upgrade the heating and insulation of buildings, while the remaining £12bn will be needed for energy generation,

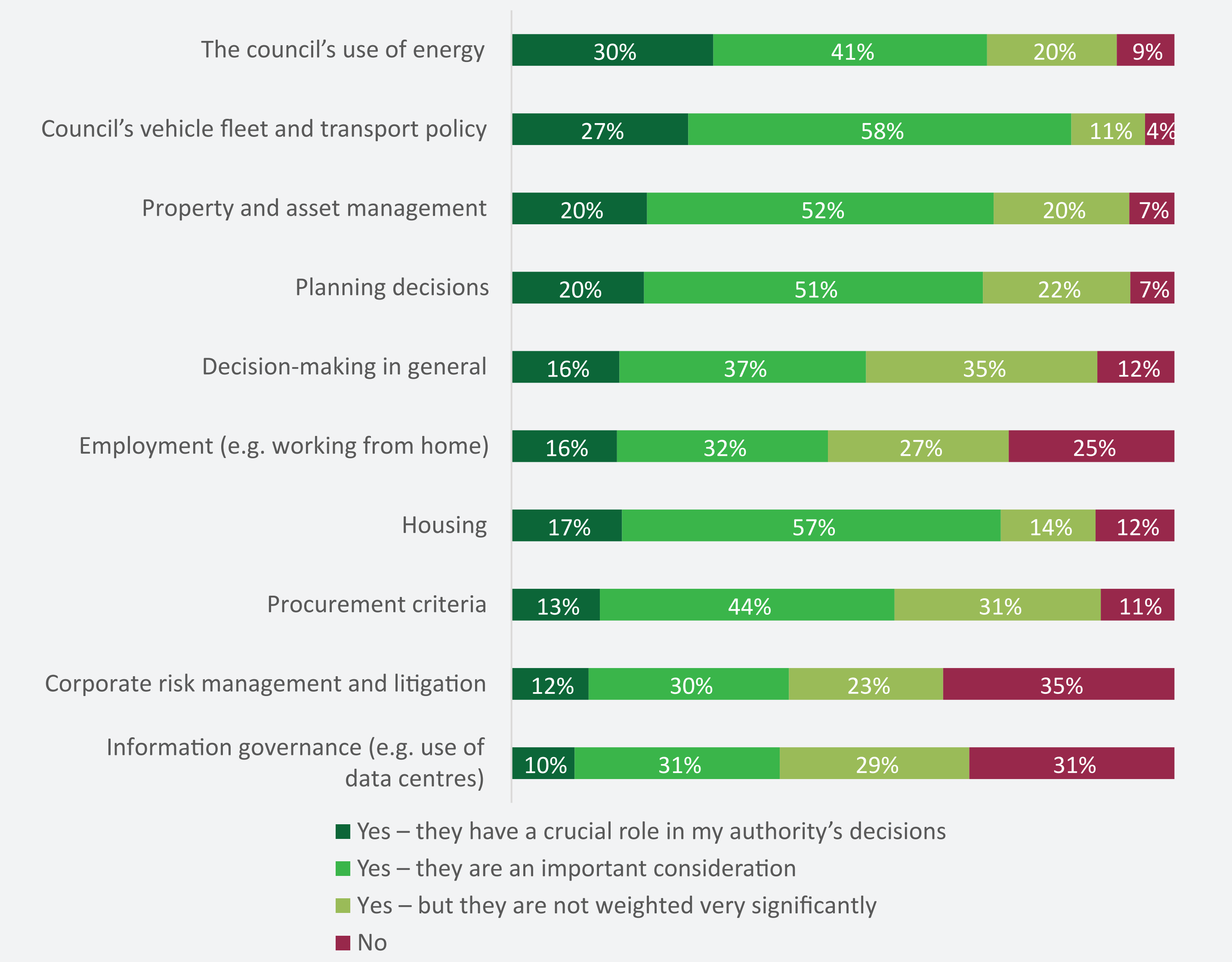

Figure 3: Does your authority include climate and other environmental factors into its following policies and practices?

distribution, storage, and EV charging.

In March this year, the combined authority's then mayor (and now Prime Minister), Andy Burnham, described the goal as "challenging, but still achievable", hailing the move to bring the city's buses back under public control and efforts to help people access retrofit support to reduce their energy bills, among other programmes.

Speaking to the combined authority's Head of Low Carbon, Dan Griffiths, it is clear that – despite the authority benefiting from a devolved financial settlement that gives it flexibility to support decarbonisation projects – clever funding approaches are essential to stay on track.

Griffiths says that Greater Manchester makes a point of focusing on projects with a strong business case, with most providing some return on investment.

"Any local authority can achieve its net zero ambition, but only if it can lever in third-party finance."

"Most of [the combined authority's] projects have a positive return on investment, but these returns can vary," he says, adding: "A lot of them do have a business model that is starting to work."

He highlights EV transitions as one of the areas that are seeing most success as many "EVs now are quite close to whole-life price parity" with fossil fuel alternatives - but access to upfront capital and "patient low-cost finance" are still important requirements.

Griffiths meanwhile notes that building connected solar panels also have "a reasonable payback" of around six or seven years.

Schemes that involve a longer period before they begin to pay off include building retrofits, specifically fabric improvements, which currently have a longer or non-commercial payback period, he says.

The need for reliable financing has meanwhile led Bristol to implement investment schemes aimed at raising funds from the public.

According to Cllr Finch, the 'Bristol Climate Action Investment Scheme' allows local residents to invest directly in council projects. "Rather than just... borrowing public sector money, we're able to borrow from our residents, who then get the return on investment themselves," she notes.

The council announced in November 2025 that the scheme closed a month early after hitting its £2m target. The funds raised will be used to install renewable energy improvements to council-owned buildings.

But these funds still pale in comparison to money raised via private-public partnerships, especially for Bristol, which has secured more than £200m in private investment for its district heat network through the Bristol City Leap project.

The project, which was said to be the first

Managing the risks of decarbonisation

Legal advice is an afterthought for the majority of councils working on decarbonisation, according to the survey, with 39% of respondents reporting that the legal department is consulted on the legal implications of the policies after they have been designed (see Figure 4).

Just 13% report that the legal department plays a "substantial role" in the formulation and planning of their authority's decarbonisation programmes, while 30% say that legal officers have very little involvement at all.

In 17% of cases, the department "is usually consulted if things go wrong", suggesting a reactive rather than proactive approach.

While the absence of a statutory duty may explain why legal teams are not always heavily involved, early legal and procurement input can play an important role in helping projects move from ambition to delivery.

Ashfords' Jonathan Croley says one of the most valuable contributions legal teams can make is helping councils establish robust contractual arrangements from the outset.

"Successful projects are not just about imposing obligations on contractors. Contracts need to be structured in a way that aligns commercial incentives with the council's objectives and supports long-term delivery. Legal teams can also help authorities understand how new projects fit alongside existing highways, street lighting and asset management arrangements, and address contractual constraints early."

Procurement teams also have an important role to play, he says.

"Clear evaluation criteria and scoring methodologies help councils define what a good tender looks like before the formal procurement process begins. That not only supports better decision-making and stronger outcomes, but can also reduce the risk of procurement challenges."

According to Croley, this is particularly important in markets where suppliers are known to scrutinise award decisions closely, such as the rapidly developing electric vehicle charging sector.

Decarbonisation-related litigation remains relatively uncommon. However, the findings suggest councils may be missing opportunities to use legal and procurement expertise proactively to strengthen project governance, improve delivery and manage risk.

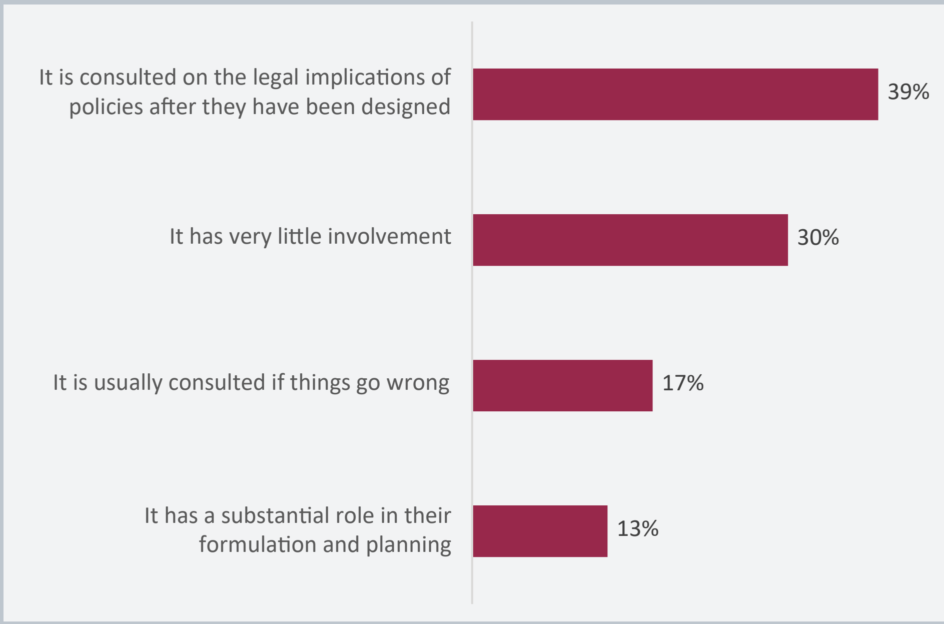

Figure 4: To what extent is the legal department usually involved in the authority's decarbonisation programmes?

of its kind in a city region when it launched in 2023, is a joint venture partnership between Bristol City Council, Ameresco and Vattenfall Heat UK, with the aim of delivering over £1 billion of investment into Bristol's energy system over 20 years.

The partnership is scheduled to spend at least £424m in its first five years on a range of large infrastructure projects, including the expansion of the city's heat network. It will also invest in solar projects and low-carbon heating systems for schools, alongside making the council's social housing more energy-efficient.

Croley says this reflects a wider shift in how councils are approaching energy projects: "We're seeing growing interest in models like power purchase agreements, energy-as-a-service and community energy schemes - ways for councils to cut emissions and attract investment without having to fund or operate the infrastructure themselves. That's particularly attractive where authorities are short on capital or specialist resource."

Commenting broadly on how to finance projects, Croley says councils typically have three options: fund the capital themselves, outsource delivery to the private sector, or adopt a hybrid of the two.

"Whether authorities fund projects themselves, use the private sector or adopt a hybrid model, the key question is where risk, control and financial exposure sit."

The injection of money does not just help councils in writing cheques. It also has a secondary impact on recruitment, drawing talent into the organisation, and in turn making money go further. This is an impact that South Gloucestershire Council's Climate Emergency Manager, Barry Wyatt, describes as the "snowball effect of funding".

Speaking on behalf of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT), he says that more advanced authorities are typically well-versed in bidding for "opportunistic funding pots", creating a cycle in which early success breeds further success – with strong performers able to assemble packages of finance, attract partners, and maintain delivery momentum.

That dynamic is reflected in places like Bristol and Greater Manchester, where creative strategies, devolved powers and in-house expertise have helped unlock large-scale investment programmes and blended finance models.

By contrast, Wyatt suggests, councils without dedicated bid-writing capacity or the commercial and technical skills needed to structure projects are far less likely to progress beyond initial plans, with decarbonisation schemes often stalling before they reach delivery stage.

As he puts it, the difference is not simply access to money, but the ability to compete for it – although that challenge may ease under the Government's plans to reduce reliance on competitive bidding and introduce longer-term funding settlements for councils.

Image: Bristol City Leap has secured investment for a number of schemes across the city region, including solar panels. **Image credit: © Bristol City Council**

Beyond funding

While funding understandably dominates the conversation, it is not the only imposing barrier between local authorities and their climate goals. As Wyatt alluded to, a lack of in-house talent can be crippling for a local authority attempting to decrease emissions.

Survey responses reflected this with better in-house skills appearing prominently as one of the most important factors for reducing carbon footprint (see figure 2).

According to Stephen Cook, an associate director at engineering firm Arup, in-house expertise is essential to keep a council on track. Cook, who is a chartered town planner and energy consultant with over two decades of experience in planning, energy, and urban development, says that having in-house talent makes working with councils much easier, adding: "You clearly do need some in-house capability and expertise so that you're not totally reliant on external advisors, because you just won't get the momentum and the political buy-in without having that internal resource giving sound advice on what is the right thing to do for the council."

He adds: "In my experience, the authorities that we're able to work with are the ones that have one or two or three in-house staff who can provide response, who can provide advice in the planning authority and so forth."

Staffing structures also play a role, according to Wyatt, who says there are benefits to having either a centralised "team of geeks" responsible for climate, or a system that disperses expertise throughout the organisation.

But they also have their drawbacks. A centralised team can end up being marginalised from the council, while dispersing climate specialists throughout the authority tends to result in a lack of deeper expertise, he says.

"I think the most successful authorities are those that combine the best of both worlds.

"They have a core group of experts working in partnership with more remote services, so that expertise and advice can be drawn on to help steer those services through an effective transition."

Wyatt adds that he is fortunate at South Gloucestershire, as he reports to an executive director who understands the priorities around climate and nature. This provides a link between him and the "top table", he notes.

Cllr Roberts meanwhile says that much of Oxfordshire's success stems from an early effort to hire officers in key areas with expertise in decarbonisation, while also offering carbon literacy training to existing officers.

"The council brought in four key officers who were incredibly knowledgeable in [net zero] – and then we hired another round of officers, including one in procurement, who had been specifically carbon literacy trained before they took on their roles.

"As a result, we had specialists rolled out into those areas, very much labelled as carbon specialists, but part of the team."

This hiring approach established a culture throughout the organisation that keeps decarbonisation on the agenda, she adds.

On top of this, Oxfordshire has encouraged its existing staff to undertake training using the Local Government Association's sustainability 'masterclasses'.

The time-intensive nature of the two-day training programme "puts a lot of people off", Cllr Roberts says, but employing already trained staff in key areas meant their knowledge spread through teams and "encouraged other team members to do the carbon literacy training when it was offered".

Is declaring an emergency enough?

It is impossible to comment on decarbonisation without acknowledging the impact of climate emergency declarations. Although they began as ambitious gestures in 2018, these declarations quickly translated into climate action plans that, in turn, have led to concrete operational change.

While these declarations do not impose any legal requirements on the councils that issue them, they have been a vital first step in shifting the organisational mindset, according to Isaac Beevor, Partnerships Director at Climate Emergency UK.

Looking back, Beevor says declarations "were very important", adding: "Before these declarations started to happen, there were only very few councils which were taking climate action and talking about it – but once those climate declarations were issued, staff were hired, strategies were put in place, targets were adopted".

Even councils that now score relatively poorly on Climate Emergency UK's scorecards are doing more on climate than they were a decade ago, largely because of the momentum generated by these declarations, he adds.

Reflecting this, survey responses show that climate considerations are now embedded across many core areas of local authority decision-making (see Figure 3).

Energy, fleet and transport policy, property and asset management, and planning decisions were among the areas where more than half of respondents said environmental factors play either a "crucial" or "important" role in decision-making. More than three-quarters of respondents said climate considerations are an important or crucial factor in council vehicle fleet and transport policy, while around seven in ten said the same of housing policy and the authority's use of energy.

The findings also suggest climate considerations have become integrated into broader corporate governance processes. More than half of respondents said environmental factors are taken into account in procurement criteria and general decision-making, although respondents were less likely to report strong climate weighting in areas such as information governance and corporate risk management. Stephen Cook of Arup also notes the impact of declarations, describing them as "mostly useful in a political sense".

But it is not the only way to keep members on target, he says, pointing to independent networks – like the 'Manchester Climate Read' (MCR) network, Sheffield's 'Green Commission', and the Leeds 'Climate Commission' – which provide external, localised oversight of council decarbonisation programmes. These networks, which are made up of stakeholders in the public, private and charitable sectors, analyse decisions from a decarbonisation perspective, make recommendations, and can provide expertise to local authorities.

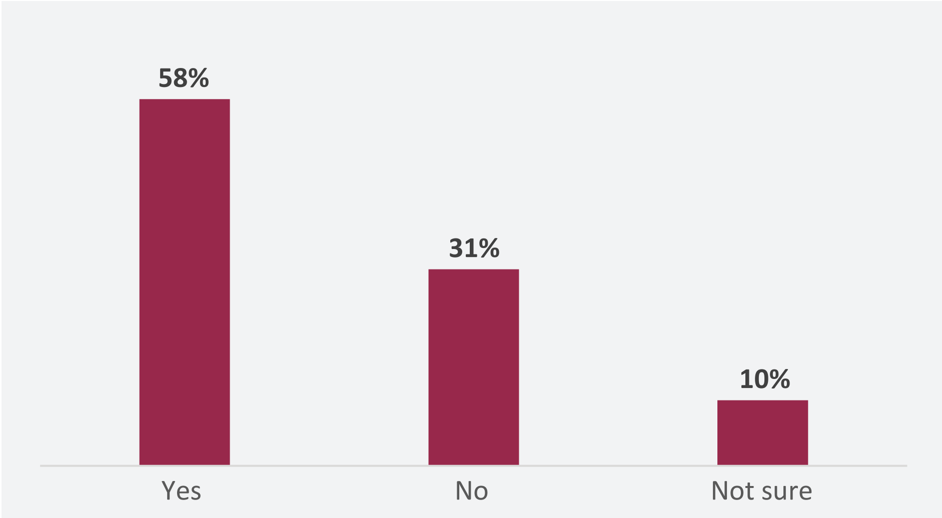

Figure 5: Should there be a statutory requirement in local authorities to move towards net zero?

In Manchester's case, the MCR says it ensures that the city council "maintains a science-based" approach to climate change that is in line with the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to well below 2°C, has a "robust" climate change strategy and targets, and provides "evidence-based reporting on the city's progress towards its climate goals".

Cook praises these approaches, noting: "Convening a place where you can continue to get a voice on behalf of this agenda has been helpful in maintaining political focus and to ensure that the council is continuing to work on the issue."

The ambition gap

While declarations – and net zero targets – triggered a flurry of activity over the last eight years, their potency is beginning to wane in some areas. Not least because following such targets remains a political choice that depends on local will – and the politics of net zero have shifted dramatically in recent years.

The rise of Reform UK, for example, represents a major political shift in many areas, and climate policy is no exception. The party's manifesto sets out plans to scrap net zero to help cut the nation's energy bills, describing the policy as "ideological". That rhetoric has already translated into action in some local authorities. At Kent County Council, the Reform administration cancelled an EV fleet transition and plans to retrofit council buildings to save £40m.

Meanwhile, the new Reform administration at West Northamptonshire Council formally moved to scrap its net zero targets and remove references to climate change and net zero from strategies and documents. The local authority's leader said West Northamptonshire would instead "refocus our sustainability efforts for the benefit of residents".

More recently, Havering Council backed a motion to end its climate emergency declaration. The motion, which was passed following Reform's electoral success in the London borough at the May elections, also said the council "should not pursue environmental or net zero-related policies in a way that places unnecessary cost, restriction, or pressure on residents, motorists, businesses, or essential council services".

These are just a few examples of the changing approach at Reform-run councils across the UK – a pattern that has become familiar at the 24 local authorities it now runs.

Despite this, it has to be acknowledged that the majority of councils are run by Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat administrations that remain broadly committed to net zero and reducing their emissions. The Green Party's rise should also be acknowledged, after the party took control of five local authorities in May. The full impact of the Green Party's election wins from a net zero and decarbonisation perspective remains to be seen. But it does underline a new dichotomy in local politics. One that is seeing some authorities scale back their climate ambitions, while others continue to push ahead.

Image: Havering became the latest Reform council to scrap its climate emergency declaration in July this year, resolving to prioritise its finances over net zero.

Imposing a statutory obligation

One measure, though, could narrow the ambition gap: a statutory obligation on councils to deliver decarbonisation or meet a net zero target.

Calls for such an obligation have been growing across parts of the sector, with the Local Government Association backing the idea last year. Respondents to the survey also supported the proposal, with 58% saying there should be a statutory duty to move towards net zero (see Figure 5).

Elsewhere in the survey, 26% of respondents said that introducing legal obligations to meet net zero targets would help their council the most in achieving its decarbonisation aims.

Supporters argue that a legal obligation would fundamentally change the way councils approach decarbonisation, replacing the current patchwork of approaches seen across England with a more consistent framework.

Isaac Beevor of Climate Emergency UK says a statutory duty would also alter the internal balance within councils by giving officers a firmer footing when climate considerations compete with other priorities.

"When they're at the table saying this is something we have to do, that's not a choice anymore," he says. "It becomes something that the council has to do."

Yet there is also broad agreement that any legal duty would need to be matched by meaningful financial support from central government. Without additional funding, interviewees warn that a statutory target could simply create further pressure on already stretched authorities.

Cllr Judy Roberts says members at Oxfordshire County Council "would really like to see some kind of statutory obligation with funding".

"If you just have the legal duties without any funding, then it increases stress and pressure within the system."

Wyatt similarly warns that imposing legal duties without resources risks becoming counterproductive.

"If you just have the legal duties without any funding, then it just increases stress and pressure within the system as councils struggle to hit another legal target," he says.

Croley suggests councils have another lever available to them beyond a statutory obligation with supporting funding: procurement.

"Councils can use procurement to support decarbonisation goals. Giving greater weight to sustainability through social value criteria could help embed low-carbon delivery in public contracts," he says.

Even without legal obligations, councils are struggling to deliver in 2026. Perhaps the most glaring example of this being the recent admission that London will not meet the 2030 net zero target set by the Mayor Sadiq Khan.

The Mayor blamed this on the Greater London Authority's lack of direct control over the energy grid and called on the Government to devolve more powers to the authority in the form of an integrated settlement. His announcement came after Islington Council – the top-ranked single-tier council for 2025, according to Climate Emergency UK – said in February this year that its 2030 target was out of reach without extra funding.

This series of announcements exposes how fragile net zero efforts can be even from the country's best performing authorities, where political opposition to net zero is minimal.

Croley says "Political winds may change, but councils that understand their funding options, procurement routes and delivery risks will be better placed to keep making progress. If low-carbon requirements are embedded into service delivery, those requirements will endure for the contract term even if the council changes its policy to move away from net zero targets."

For now, decarbonisation efforts appear uneven across local government. If the political climate in 2018 and 2019 was one defined by consensus around decarbonisation programmes at the local level, the climate of today is defined by a growing divergence in ambition, resources and political support.

Adam Carey is a Senior Reporter at Local Government Lawyer.

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