

Energy Across the Authority

Seventh Edition





APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) is a not for profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK. Promoting excellence in public services, APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority front line services, hosting a network for front line service providers in areas such as waste and refuse collection, parks and environmental services, leisure, school meals, cleaning, housing and building maintenance.

APSE Energy is part of the APSE family and focuses on energy, climate change and sustainability. We are keeping our members up to date with developments across this varied and dynamic agenda. As a group of over 130 local authorities with different geographies, responsibilities, experience and expertise we are coming together to learn from and share with each other. We all recognise the importance of these topics and that we are at different points on the journey as we look to maximise the benefits of working together. APSE Energy provides a series of events enabling officers and councillors to come together in person and virtually; a range of material about technologies, business models, legislation, best practice, case studies and research; an advocacy role to promote the role of the sector within these agendas and; consultancy support for those requiring expert support to make progress with projects.

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1. Foreword

The topic of energy remains high on the political and household agenda for obvious reasons. The war in the Middle East, the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz and continuing hostilities in Ukraine have caused the prices of many commodities to rise. The impact on UK energy costs was initially a dramatic increase in petrol which subsequently dropped but remains higher than a year ago as well as higher gas prices. Ofgem have set the price cap for a typical dual-fuel household bill at £1,862 per year - an increase of 13% or £221 per year.

Obviously, there is a variety of responses to increasing prices. Some argue for the use of North Sea oil and gas reserves. Others look for reliance on alternative sources of energy such as LPG. Others look to renewables and storage as the answer. Whichever option is chosen we know none will come into play immediately, least of all the North Sea choice. We will continue to rely on a mix of sources simply because the infrastructure needed to get even the quickest sources online takes time to install, irrelevant of the will to act.

The UK may not be the largest emitter globally but that does not mean we shouldn't make our contribution and the same goes for local authorities.

The nature of the debate has changed around energy with a focus on energy efficiency and savings on bills in the context of the current cost of living crisis. Many feel that the term 'net zero' isn't widely understood by the general public and emissions reductions are a lesser priority as costs rise.

It is APSE's position that climate change is real, emissions are rising, we all have a part to play and the outcome is the most important factor rather than the description that is used to realise that outcome. The technology exists to be more energy efficient and to generate renewable energy. Local authorities should plan for and spend on this agenda in line with their financial obligations.

As we move ever closer to 2030, a milestone year for many local net zero targets, the pace of work within local government has accelerated, with energy efficiency, resilience and decarbonisation remaining central to the agenda.

Through our publications, briefings, events and forums, APSE Energy continues to support local authorities in sharing knowledge, building capacity and celebrating success. The winners of the APSE Energy awards 2026 featured in this year's edition of Energy Across the Authority showcase the diversity and determination of councils across the country, demonstrating the real impact of local energy and climate leadership. If you are inspired by any of the case studies within this document and would like to find out how APSE Energy could support the development or delivery of your project, feel free to get in touch; we would be happy to help.

As we approach the critical years ahead, we hope these examples provide inspiration and practical insight to help every authority continue its journey towards a cleaner, more sustainable future.



2. Executive Summary

This is the 7th edition of APSE Energy's Energy Across the Authority. The aim of this publication is to provide members with insight into the diverse and innovative projects being delivered by local authorities across the UK, showcasing the range of ways councils are engaging with the energy and climate change agenda.

Each of the 6 case studies featured demonstrates local government leadership in the face of the climate emergency and highlights the practical action being taken to decarbonise operations, improve resilience and deliver tangible benefits for local communities. From local energy generation and retrofit schemes to community engagement and sustainable infrastructure, these examples show how councils are turning strategy into delivery.

Winner of the Supporting Innovation Category

The Highland Council

'Clean Highland: A Regional Model for Net Zero Energy Investment and Innovation'

The Highland Council's Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Portfolio delivers a pioneering, place-based model for public sector decarbonisation and energy investment. Integrating council and community-led projects, the programme combines large-scale renewable generation, energy efficiency and grid innovation to drive economic growth and resilience. Anchored by the emerging Clean Highland Fund, it unites public, private and community investors in delivering long-term, locally retained value - making Highland a national exemplar for clean energy innovation.

Winner of the Accessing and Managing Finance category

Westminster City Council

'Westminster Climate Fund - Redefining Carbon Offset Finance for Community Climate Action'

The Westminster Climate Fund demonstrates how financial governance can drive people and place centred climate ambition. By transforming

a constrained, underspent carbon offset pot into a strategic, citywide physical and social infrastructure investment fund, Westminster has created a model for inclusive, outcome-driven climate finance. The Fund now delivers measurable carbon savings, grassroots community action and environmental and social co-benefits, setting a precedent for how councils across the UK can reimagine their role as stewards of public and developer-based climate finance.

Winner of the Supporting Innovation Category Suffolk County Council 'Collaboration in Action – The Suffolk Story'

The Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (SCCP) unites local authorities, public bodies and communities to achieve Net Zero by 2030. Funded primarily by annual local authority contributions, it delivers projects on carbon reduction, energy efficiency and climate resilience. Key initiatives include business and school decarbonisation support, community energy networks and engagement through events like the Youth Climate Conference. With strong governance, measurable impacts and innovative collaboration, SCCP demonstrates a replicable model for tackling climate change while promoting equity and sustainability across Suffolk.

Winner of the Clean Energy - Heat Category Westmorland and Furness Council 'Delivering low carbon heating solutions and decarbonised buildings'

Westmorland and Furness Council aim to achieve net zero Scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2037 through its award-winning Carbon Management Strategy 2024–2029. A comprehensive, fabric-first and renewable-enabled decarbonisation programme is being delivered across the entire estate, supported by data-driven planning. By integrating energy management software, condition surveys and heat decarbonisation plans, the council prioritises projects delivering maximum carbon and cost savings while supporting schools, communities and partners, including undertaking heat network feasibility studies across the council area.

Winner of the Clean Energy - Power Category Dorset Council 'Powering Dorset's clean energy future'

Dorset Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and has since committed to becoming a net zero council by 2035 and a net zero county by 2045. Achieving this ambition requires bold action on clean power generation and Dorset Council is leading the way. Through strategic investment, innovative delivery and strong collaboration, the council is transforming its estate and empowering communities and businesses to generate renewable energy at scale.

Winner of the Decarbonising Transport Category Hackney Council 'Powering the transition to EVs in Hackney'

Hackney Council are setting a new benchmark for EV charging infrastructure with its ambitious plan to install 2,500 on-street chargers by 2026. This initiative addresses a critical barrier to EV adoption in dense urban areas: the lack of off-street parking for many residents. By creating a scalable and accessible network, the project promotes an inclusive and equitable shift to electric vehicles.



3. Why are local authorities engaged?

Local authorities have always played a central role in supporting their communities and local economies. Energy underpins every aspect of daily life and is central to the services councils provide. The municipalisation of energy is about local authorities taking a proactive role in this agenda: using their assets, skills and leadership to be energy efficient, generate clean energy, reduce costs, improve energy security and tackle fuel poverty.

But the impact of this work goes far beyond energy bills. Councils are increasingly recognising that energy is inseparable from the wider sustainability and climate agenda. Decisions about how energy is produced, supplied and used have direct consequences for housing, transport, health, air quality, biodiversity and economic resilience.

Councils are uniquely placed to bring energy into the heart of their work. By investing in renewable generation, delivering local energy services, and embedding energy into their climate action plans, they can make a direct impact on issues such as air quality, affordability, and resilience. At the same time, they can generate income and reduce their own corporate energy bills.

Energy is not a side issue; it is embedded in everything councils do. Improving housing stock through energy efficiency reduces fuel poverty and improves health outcomes. Decarbonising transport cuts emissions and air pollution, supporting public health and climate targets. Green skills and employment programmes linked to local energy projects strengthen the economy and create future opportunities. In this way, the municipalisation of energy becomes a driver for sustainability across the whole range of council services.

Through innovative projects and policies, councils are already demonstrating how local leadership in energy can increase revenue. Solar farms, the decarbonisation of leisure centres, and schemes to provide affordable renewable power to businesses are creating cleaner, more affordable energy while stimulating local economies and green jobs.

The municipalisation of energy is therefore not just about power generation. It is about embedding energy into the broader sustainability agenda, ensuring councils can play a central role in building thriving, fairer, low-carbon localities and helping to address the problems of a changing climate.



4. What is the local authority role?

Although there is no statutory requirement for councils to meet net zero, most have declared climate emergencies and set ambitions well ahead of the UK Government's 2050 target. Local authorities are key to this agenda because of the influence they hold as major employers, service providers, asset owners and community leaders. The starting point is their own operations. Councils are significant energy users and reducing their consumption cuts both energy bills and emissions. From switching to green tariffs, installing efficiency measures, and comparing tariffs, to investing in on-site generation and specifying low carbon alternatives in procurement, there are clear opportunities to lead by example. Leisure centres, civic buildings and community facilities are often heavy energy users, so fitting heat pumps or solar panels can achieve substantial savings.

Beyond their own footprint, councils can shape the wider energy system. Government policy is moving towards a more decentralised grid, and local generation projects, such as solar farms, rooftop PV, heat networks and private wire agreements, help ease pressure on national infrastructure while providing affordable power locally. Electric vehicles and heat decarbonisation are also areas where councils play a central role. By rolling out charging points, investing in low-emission fleets and supporting clean air zones, local authorities can drive behaviour change while improving public health.

Energy, however, cannot be viewed in isolation. It is deeply connected to the broader sustainability agenda. Councils are responsible for housing standards, transport systems, waste management, education, public health and green spaces. Decisions in each of these areas affect the cost of living crisis, community resilience and carbon emissions. For example, raising the energy efficiency of housing stock reduces fuel poverty, improves health outcomes and reduces emissions. Decarbonising public transport fleets and rolling out charging infrastructure for electric vehicles improves air quality and encourages sustainable mobility. Protecting and enhancing green spaces supports biodiversity, mitigates flooding, and provides vital spaces for recreation and wellbeing.

The climate crisis requires councils to see energy as a driver of change across all these areas. Heat decarbonisation is a clear example of this interconnectedness. From heat networks to heat pumps local authorities will be central in testing, deploying and scaling solutions that reduce dependence on fossil fuels and introduces technology to their estates. National funding streams have provided opportunities for councils to deliver projects that address social issues such as fuel poverty, poor air quality and poor housing conditions. Strategic planning is equally important. Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (LHEES) in Scotland, as well as Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs), provide roadmaps to net zero at a local level. These plans enable councils to integrate energy with wider issues such as health, wellbeing, education, digital infrastructure and economic development. As the smart cities agenda develops, energy will become ever more central. Data-driven solutions, new asset classes like EV charging and technology enabled services will shape how councils manage infrastructure. Ensuring energy is integrated into these strategies will be vital for resilience and sustainability.

Ultimately, the role of local authorities is not limited to managing their own consumption or delivering isolated projects. They are leaders within their communities, and their actions signal the importance of the energy agenda to residents, businesses and partner organisations. By embedding energy within the wider agenda, housing, transport, health, wellbeing, biodiversity and skills, councils can act as powerful agents of change. They can demonstrate that managing energy and climate action is not an additional task but a way of improving the quality, affordability and resilience of the services they already provide.

APSE Energy supports local authorities in fulfilling this role, providing research, surveys, briefing papers and practical tools to help councils understand the challenges, explore opportunities and deliver meaningful local outcomes. In this way, councils can use the municipalisation of energy not only to cut costs and emissions, but to tackle the wider climate crisis and create thriving, sustainable localities for the future.

5. APSE Energy Services

APSE Energy can provide support to help local authorities meet their ambitions around energy, climate change and sustainability. We can contribute knowledge and capacity to in-house teams for specific projects. Plans often include one-off projects which require specialist understanding of technologies, legislation or experience of having 'done it before'. Many of our associates have worked as local authority officers and so understand the context and schedules within a council as well as the officer/member relationship. They are experts in their industry with substantial experience, academic qualifications and professional recognition.

For more information about the kind of support we can offer contact Phil Brennan at pbrennan@apse.org.uk



6. Case Studies

6.1 The Highland Council

‘Clean Highland: A Regional Model for Net Zero Energy Investment and Innovation’

Introduction

The Highland Council’s Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Portfolio lies at the core of the authority’s Our Future Highland: Delivery Plan 2024–2027. Covering one-third of Scotland’s landmass yet home to only 236,000 residents, the Highlands face profound challenges in decarbonisation: long grid connections, high energy costs, dispersed rural settlements, and an over-reliance on imported fuels.

Rather than viewing these as barriers, the Council reframed them as opportunities to create a place-based regional energy system—where innovation, investment, and inclusion go hand in hand. The portfolio unites all strands of energy activity across the Council—corporate, housing, transport, and community—into a single coordinated framework that delivers both carbon reduction and regional economic growth.

Drivers for Change

Highland Council recognised that meeting Net Zero targets could not rely on piecemeal projects. A systematic, long-term approach was required to:

- decarbonise the Council’s own 1,500-building estate and 1,000-vehicle fleet;
- unlock the Highlands’ renewable energy wealth for local reinvestment;
- alleviate fuel poverty—affecting 43 % of Highland households;
- overcome grid constraints limiting renewable expansion; and
- create local jobs and skills pathways for a just transition.

The solution was to embed innovation into both governance and delivery—creating a framework that aligns clean-energy infrastructure, finance and community participation across all services.

The Innovation

At the heart of the approach is the portfolio model—a fully integrated investment and delivery structure linking multiple energy workstreams and technologies under one strategic banner.

1. The Clean Highland Fund

A first for Scotland, the Clean Highland Fund (CHF) is being established as a regional investment vehicle to co-own renewable assets with industry and community partners. Capital from the Council and external investors—including GB Energy and institutional funds—will be deployed across wind, solar, storage, hydrogen and heat projects. Returns will be recycled into local decarbonisation, creating a permanent legacy fund for the region.

2. Whole-System Planning

The portfolio embeds the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) and emerging Local Area Energy Plans (LAEP) directly into capital investment decisions. This ensures every project—from building retrofit to district heating—is geographically and economically aligned, supporting both social housing and private households in a single place-based framework.

3. Technological and Commercial Innovation

A suite of flagship projects demonstrates innovation across the energy spectrum:

- Battery Energy Storage (BESS): Developing investible models to harness curtailed renewable generation and enhance grid stability, addressing local capacity constraints;
- Utility-Scale Solar PV (Longman Solar Farm): An £11.5 million, 10 MW development generating clean power for export, with future potential for direct supply to adjacent hydrogen and transport infrastructure;
- Commercial Solar PPA Portfolio: A new Power Purchase Agreement model enabling tenants in council-owned business premises to access low-cost, green electricity;
- Longman Green Energy Hub: A joint-venture hydrogen facility aligned to the UK's Hydrogen Allocation Round 2, scaling from 20 MW to 100 MW for regional production and distribution;

- EV Infrastructure Programme: The Council leads Scotland's North-of-Scotland procurement partnership, delivering 150 new charge sites across Highland, Moray, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City;
- Energy Efficient Council Programme: Technical surveys of 300 buildings to identify costed retrofit projects, expected to save £0.6 million annually in energy use;
- EES:ABS and Domestic Retrofit: Over 141 homes upgraded in 2023/24, 82 % occupied by households in extreme fuel poverty. Social and private tenures are integrated within one delivery framework—an exemplar of the LHEES methodology in practice;
- Energy Billing Management System: A digital platform managing £25 million of annual utility spend, identifying anomalies and recovering erroneous charges worth £0.7 million per year.

Each project stands alone as a success but, critically, they are interconnected—creating a self-sustaining ecosystem of innovation that spans generation, storage, distribution, efficiency, and behaviour change.

Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

The portfolio thrives on collaboration. It brings together a vast network of partners, each playing a role in delivery and innovation.

Public-Sector Collaboration

The Council works with NHS Highland, Scottish Water, emergency services and neighbouring authorities to share energy infrastructure, maximise economies of scale, and accelerate carbon reduction. The EV infrastructure project, delivered through a shared procurement service, exemplifies regional partnership at its best.

Private-Sector Partnerships

Through Requests for Information and Prior Information Notices, the Council has engaged leading industry specialists in BESS, solar, and hydrogen development to shape viable delivery models. This proactive approach has repositioned Highland Council as an anchor client and co-investor, not merely a grant recipient.

Communities and the Third Sector

Partnerships with Community Energy Scotland, local development trusts and the Council's Social Charter Team ensure that community priorities and benefit funds are embedded from project inception. The "Powering Futures" education programme extends this commitment to schools and training providers, building a pipeline of local green skills.

Investors and Policy Stakeholders

Engagement with DESNZ, Scottish Government and GB Energy ensures alignment with national policy and funding opportunities. The Council's work has informed emerging government thinking on regional investment models and grid reform, cementing Highland's role as a strategic partner in the UK's energy transition.

Integration Across the Council

Innovation is most powerful when it becomes part of core business. The Net Zero Portfolio links with all five other portfolios within the Delivery Plan:

- Reconfiguring the Council's Asset Base: Integrating renewable generation into the Learning Estate and Strategic Asset Management Plans;
- Income Generation: Creating new revenue streams from energy projects, visitor levies, and commercialisation;
- Corporate Solutions: Utilising digital innovation (Terra Tracker, Data Foundations) to map energy assets and track emissions;
- Workforce for the Future: Aligning green-skills pathways with regional employers through the Energy and Green Jobs Skills Board;
- Person-Centred Solutions: Using energy investment to enhance wellbeing—lower bills, warmer homes, and sustainable transport access.

This cross-portfolio integration ensures that energy innovation supports every aspect of council service delivery and community life.

Outcomes and Impacts

The portfolio has already produced substantial and measurable outcomes:

Outcome	Impact
Carbon Reduction	Council-wide emissions projected to fall 30 % by 2027; long-term trajectory to Net Zero by 2045.
Financial Efficiency	£5 million annualised savings identified through energy and asset rationalisation.
Income Generation	£2.5 million per year projected by 2026 from solar and energy assets.
Investment Pipeline	£114.7 million of capital opportunities identified, enabling ongoing investment without reliance on grant funding.
Community Benefit	Over 50 % of energy programme value delivered through local contractors; £2.4 million external funds leveraged for HRA retrofit.
Regional Inward Investment	£800 million anticipated through heat network and hydrogen projects by 2035.
EV Infrastructure	150 new public and fleet chargers supporting transport decarbonisation and rural access.
Skills & Employment	Expansion of local green jobs through installations and maintenance contracts; partnership with UHI and DYW to embed training.

Each achievement demonstrates that innovation has translated into practical, scalable outcomes that enhance both sustainability and resilience.

Value, Risk, and Learning

The Council's approach to innovation places strong emphasis on governance, risk management, and shared learning. Key lessons include:

- **Invest Early in Data and Due Diligence:** The development of the Terra Tracker and Energy Billing platforms proved vital for accurate asset mapping and cost control;
- **Blend Funding Sources:** Combining capital borrowing, Salix funding, developer contributions and community investment has reduced risk while maximising impact;

- Co-Design with Communities: Consultations on hydrogen projects and Common Good land use built public trust and strengthened project approvals;
- Iterative Learning: Pilot schemes (solar PPAs, EV hubs, whole-house retrofits) act as test beds to refine procurement and investment models before scaling up;
- Embed Legacy Value: All projects include biodiversity net gain, training commitments and income reinvestment mechanisms to keep benefits local.

These practices have created a learning ecosystem within the Council, ensuring that innovation is sustainable, evidence-based, and replicable across the public sector.

Wider Contribution and Influence

The Highland model has attracted national attention as a template for regional energy governance. It directly contributes to:

- Scotland's Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan—demonstrating how local government can mobilise investment for regional benefit;
- UK Net Zero Strategy and DESNZ Objectives—supporting energy security through decentralised generation and storage;
- Community Wealth Building in Practice—retaining value in local supply chains and reinvesting profits within Highland communities;
- Innovation in Financing Public Infrastructure—pioneering hybrid models that blend public, private and community ownership without loss of control.

Through Clean Highland Fund and the integrated investment pipeline, the Council is helping to redefine how public authorities can act as market participants in the green economy—proving that decarbonisation can deliver both social equity and financial return.

Communication and Engagement

Transparency and communication are essential to sustaining innovation. The Council has:

- launched an Energy Mail Box for public feedback on EV infrastructure and renewable developments;

- maintained continuous engagement with local members, community councils, and regional forums;
- reported progress through open-data dashboards linked to the Council's Performance Plan; and
- used social media and local media campaigns to highlight community benefits, jobs created and carbon savings achieved.

This proactive communication builds confidence among residents, investors, and staff, reinforcing Highland's leadership role in the energy transition.

Future Direction and Scalability

The next phase of the portfolio will consolidate Highland's position as a regional energy powerhouse:

- Clean Highland Fund Launch (2026): Blended capital raise to support multi-project investment in operational and new developments;
- Regional Energy Investment Partnerships: Joint ventures with developers and community bodies for shared ownership of wind and solar assets;
- Heat Network Expansion: First two commercially viable district heat projects under construction by 2026;
- Digital Energy Management: Real-time carbon budgeting embedded in financial reporting across all services;
- Repowering and Innovation Cycle: Projects will be structured to repower after 35 years, ensuring permanent energy legacy and regional reinvestment.

These plans will ensure the Highland Council continues to pioneer innovative, data-driven, and financially resilient approaches to energy management.

Conclusion

The *Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Portfolio* demonstrates that innovation is not confined to technology—it is about re-imagining governance, finance and partnership to deliver measurable, lasting impact.

- It transforms the Council from consumer to producer, generating clean energy, income and opportunity;
- It redefines local government's investment role, using the Clean Highland Fund to attract and reinvest capital in the region;
- It unites every aspect of the organisation, embedding Net Zero thinking in housing, property, transport, finance and education;
- It empowers communities and businesses, ensuring that the transition to Net Zero is inclusive, equitable, and place-based;
- And it positions Highland as a national leader, proving that even the most remote and rural regions can deliver world-class innovation.

In short, the Highland Council has created a living blueprint for the UK's clean-energy future—ambitious, collaborative, and enduring.



6.2 Westminster City Council

'Westminster Climate Fund – Redefining Carbon Offset Finance for Community Climate Action'

Background

Westminster City Council (WCC) has reimagined the use of carbon offset funding; transforming what was once a restricted, underspent pot for council only projects into a flexible, high-impact Climate Fund that supports innovation, community energy and co-benefits across the city. Through bold leadership on policy, governance and fund management, Westminster has delivered investment of £10 million to deliver over 45,000 tonnes of carbon emissions reduction in the city. By shifting from compliance-driven spending to outcome-driven investment, Westminster has turned a challenge of underspend into a model of sustainable, inclusive climate finance.

Overview:

Carbon Offsetting through the London Plan is a policy instrument designed to incentivise low-carbon development, which results in \$106 developer contributions which should be spent on projects which offset carbon locally. However, throughout London these funds are underspent, and local councils have faced barriers in effectively spending these funds. Westminster was a prime example of this, having collected £16 million in contributions and as of October 2023, spent only £3 million, primarily funding council-led projects. A key barrier to mobilising offset finance across London is that the realities of local net zero projects are not factored into the price of carbon. The price of carbon across London is £95 per tonne, which is not a realistic outcome for local projects in an urban environment. Westminster City Council has been able to set a more realistic price of £880 through its retrofit-first policy under the 2024 City Plan. This was the first step the council took, ensuring that the policy achieved its intention as a real incentive for low-carbon development. However, this still left the council with over £13 million of unspent funding and a lack of resources and mechanisms to deploy it effectively and equitably.

Actions

During 2024, the council began work to rethink the potential case uses of the fund to allow for flexibility and address the realities of both individual net zero project development and the strategic funding landscape. Through stress testing, the council found that the original criteria, designed using the GLA guidance, did not provide opportunities for key strategic revenue projects, feasibility studies, innovative projects and energy generation projects. Also, initial external funding rounds in 2024 showed mixed results; there were strong carbon saving projects coming forward, but there was limited scale due to the fund's low profile, and the organisations applying tended to be large cultural organisations with the resources to develop carbon cost effective projects. For the second half of 2024 the council made the decision to re-design the fund's criteria to support more equitable distribution and accessibility.

This work began in the background whilst the council undertook an internal competitive funding round in December 2024, designed to accelerate climate action across all departments. WCC's environment team recognised that the end of Innovate UK's pathfinder places funding (in which WCC had two projects) was indicative of the wider funding landscape for innovative climate projects becoming challenging.

This flexing of the criteria meant the council was able to fund the following innovative projects:

- Development of PACER: An innovative embodied carbon planning tool, designed to deliver indirect carbon savings in the planning process;
- Retrofit procurement club: A collaborative procurement model that pools retrofit demand across council, community and business buildings to secure lower costs, better quality, and faster, large-scale decarbonisation;
- Optimising future homes: A person-centred post-occupancy evaluation pilot that helps residents optimise low-carbon heating systems in new homes while feeding real-world insights back to design teams to reduce indirect carbon emissions across Westminster's future housing pipeline;
- Micro Logistics Hub: A micro logistics hub trial enabling last-mile

deliveries by e-cargo bikes instead of vans, cutting carbon and air pollution while creating a replicable model for low-emission freight across Westminster.

Challenges and Overcoming Them:

Whilst this investment in the council's internal climate action maturity was important, the council had a higher ambition in mind: to build the mechanisms to deliver equitable investment in climate projects across the city. First, the council took the decision to hire a dedicated Green Funding Manager to develop this funding programme. This marked the beginning of a period of funding programme development which included a range of stakeholder engagement activities to establish local demand and take lessons from other funding programmes. The council utilises its [Environmental Justice Measure](#) to support the design of key projects, including in its place-based North Paddington programme.

This ongoing work and programmes set the framework for goals for the development of the funding programme:

- To deploy this capital effectively towards carbon reduction and the Council's net zero city-wide target, using the LAEP pathway as a framework;
- To deploy targeted capital in a just and equitable way, ensuring support for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations (VCS) and local communities;
- To build on the Greener Living approach to enabling collective action in North Paddington.

To achieve multiple goals, a high-profile communications presence a rebranding was necessary. Officers received feedback that the term 'carbon offset' was confusing and off-putting to many people and did not reflect the funding programme's wider objectives. Offsetting is seen as a very transactional function, and officers made the internal case that being in the mindset of 'like for like' offsets does not reflect the original intention of the Section 106: "to redistribute the value of development for the public good". The change of name was more than just seeking an appropriate name for communications purposes, but a shift in mindset of how this funding is distributed.

Importantly, the Council recognised there is injustice in comparing applications from the VCS and community sector with those from the resource rich business and cultural sectors. Westminster is home to historic and prestigious cultural organisations, and the Council recognised the need and storytelling potential of supporting their sustainability journey, but it was necessary to ensure this was balanced with supporting the community sector organisations providing services to residents. A recent study by SIB found some charities are spending 50% of their total operating budget on energy bills, the Council was determined to support local providers in cutting their bills, and carbon. The introduction of categories provided the ability to diversify project types, reach different audiences and assess projects based on their merits

Four distinct categories were designed for the fund:

1. **City Decarbonisation:** To support Cultural and Business sectors in capital carbon saving projects;
2. **Community Energy and Retrofit:** To support energy saving projects for the local VCS sector, and the development of community energy – a key piece of missing social infrastructure in Westminster;
3. **Feasibility:** To support the development of projects for the first two categories;
4. **Greener Living:** For local environmental action projects, building the social infrastructure locally to support a low carbon transition.

Another key diversification was the introduction of the Greener Living category. Greener Living is the name of a behaviour change approach to local climate action the Council has developed and is testing in North Paddington. The approach is about reframing local climate and environmental action, moving away from technical language, and focusing on encouraging positive behaviors and action across 5 themes:

- Where we live;
- How we move;
- What we buy, use and dispose of;
- What we eat;
- How we protect nature.

Westminster City Council's engagement team had been implementing this approach through local Community Climate Champions, and through a series of capacity building sessions in North Paddington, and it recognised that there was great potential for supporting local action across these themes with small grants. Although some have questioned whether behaviour-change initiatives align with the purpose of carbon offset funding, Westminster's approach recognises that durable emissions reductions depend not only on technology, but on the social infrastructure that supports it.

To ensure the Westminster Climate Fund could respond to the varied needs of the city, the Council introduced a two-cycle funding structure: a Summer Round and a Winter Round, allowing projects to come forward at the right stage of development, accommodating both "shovel-ready" capital schemes and earlier-stage feasibility or innovation pilots. A multifaceted comms and engagement campaign was conducted to promote the fund; utilising existing networks like the sustainable city charter and community partnerships, the Council ensured that it gave multiple opportunities to explain this new 4 category fund, through running multiple 'meet the funder sessions' and offering bespoke pre-application sessions to individual organisations. This involved a commitment of officer time, drawing on expertise across the Council's environment team, and utilising its national graduate scheme, to offer a young graduate the opportunity to be part of this innovative funding programme.

Outcomes

The results of the summer round were overwhelmingly positive:

- Over 85 applications were received into the fund, a 10x increase on previous funding rounds;
- Over 50 projects have been funded across the city, allocating £5.5 million to support over 70 local organisations;
- A projected saving of 19,000 tonnes of carbon;

Key funded projects and activities include:

- Community Energy Company: A £500,000 programme to create Westminster's first community-owned platform for local solar and

retrofit projects;

- Cost saving programmes at Key Service centre's: cost saving retrofit schemes at a key community service centres;
- Community Church Retrofit: Deep retrofit of a historic church to reduce energy use and provide a warm, resilient community space;
- Iconic Venue Transformation: A major cultural landmark goes green with solar power, LED lighting, and a living roof to cut emissions and boost biodiversity;
- Heritage Hall Revitalisation: A historic performance space swaps gas heating for clean energy, safeguarding heritage while going net zero-ready;
- Innovation Challenge: Pairing local climate-tech innovators with big Westminster businesses to test new decarbonisation solutions;
- Circular City Hub: Launching a reuse and refill facility powered by renewables and e-cargo bikes, cutting single-use waste across Westminster;
- Greening the Carnival: Reimagining one of Westminster's most iconic cultural traditions, transforming waste materials into dazzling, sustainable Carnival costumes;
- Everyday Climate Action: Empowering refugee and migrant families to take practical steps at home from energy-saving workshops and upcycling to growing food and reducing waste;
- Upcycle Collective: Turning repair, reuse, and creativity into community empowerment from sewing and mending to furniture restoration and art therapy, giving skills and confidence while cutting waste;
- Voices for Change: Training local residents, from youth groups to people with learning disabilities, to become climate ambassadors. Co-leading workshops, performances, and campaigns that make sustainability inclusive and visible.

Westminster's experience demonstrates that carbon offset funds can be deployed strategically and equitably, provided councils invest in governance reform, cross-department collaboration and early engagement with communities. The introduction of a realistic carbon price, clear funding categories, and a dedicated Green Funding Manager were critical enablers. The model can provide a blueprint for how Section 106 funds can be used more flexibly to deliver climate and social value.

6.3 Suffolk County Council

'Collaboration in Action – The Suffolk Story'

Background:

The Suffolk Climate Change Partnership unites local authorities, public bodies, and communities to achieve Net Zero by 2030. Funded primarily by annual LA contributions, it delivers projects on carbon reduction, energy efficiency, and climate resilience. Key initiatives include business and school decarbonisation support, community energy networks, and engagement through events like the Youth Climate Conference. With strong governance, measurable impacts, and innovative collaboration, SCCP demonstrates a replicable model for tackling climate change while promoting equity and sustainability across Suffolk.

Overview:

The Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (SCCP) has a long history of bringing together all Suffolk local authorities (LA), organisations, and regional partners. The partnership's overarching goal is to support Suffolk's journey to net zero. This involves working collaboratively with other public sector partners, local community groups, schools, and businesses to promote sustainability and resilience across the county, in line with key actions within the Suffolk Climate Emergency Action Plan (SCEP) assisting with Suffolk's Councils' aspiration to achieve Net Zero by 2030.

The SCCP is defined as ***“a partnership comprising of the paid membership of Suffolk's Local Authorities, working alongside other organisations locally”***.

All partners share a common commitment: to help Suffolk's residents, businesses, and communities to reduce carbon emissions, realise the economic benefits of reducing energy consumption and adapt to the future impacts of climate change. Member organisations have also committed to reducing carbon emissions from their own estates and operations.

Partnership members include:

Suffolk County Council

East Suffolk Council

Mid Suffolk District Council

Environment Agency

University of Suffolk

Babergh District Council

Ipswich Borough Council

West Suffolk Council

Groundwork East

Greater South East Net Zero Hub

How is the Partnership funded

Each LA provides an annual financial contribution based on the size of the area covered, totalling £175k. The approach and strong reputation for delivery on the Net Zero agenda has allowed the partnership to draw significant levels of external funding into Suffolk: some £17mn to date

This funding, alongside funding received from other sources, including Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders (SPSL), has enabled the formation of a dedicated team including since 2022: Partnership Manager, Community Support Officer, Project Officer, Project Support Officer, Schools Sustainability Lead, and Schools Support Officer. In January 2026, the partnership welcomed a Climate Adaptation Officer as result of working closely with the Suffolk Resilience Partnership.

The partnership invests in community-scale energy infrastructure, including owning and managing a 30kWp solar PV array under a 20-year roof rental and power purchase agreement with the University of Suffolk, which commenced in March 2019. It forms part of a Bio-Solar research space providing a comparison between solar PV and green roofing systems. In the past 2 years SCCP has received £9,639 in payments from the panels. The SCCP team work for, and with, every individual LA within Suffolk, enabling a shared resource and improved capacity for project support and delivery across the county.

The Partnership plays a central role in coordinating and implementing county-wide initiatives aimed at:

- Reducing carbon emissions;
- Improving energy efficiency for homes, businesses, and public buildings;
- Enhancing climate resilience to adapt to changing environmental

conditions;

- Tackling inequality by ensuring sustainability benefits reach all communities.

Key Workstreams:

1. Working Knowledge and Best Practice Sharing:

The partnership serves as a forum for sharing best practice and knowledge on climate action, regarding both internal and customer focused practices. Quarterly meetings are held across the county to enable each LA to showcase projects. Previous visits have included solar arrays on public car parks by Mid Suffolk District Council, and the new waste depot and electric waste collection fleet by Ipswich Borough Council.

Suffolk County Council regularly provides space allowing all involved officers from across the county to work from the same space for the day, empowering conversation and better connections. This collaboration between councils enables knowledge sharing, joint resources, accelerates progress and helps everyone tackle the problem despite difficult funding circumstance.

2. Working with Businesses on Energy Efficiency Support:

Funding from SPSL has enabled a range of services aimed at business support, including £124k provided for the Net Zero Suffolk Consultancy, which has:

- Supported 800 organisations;
- Identified annual savings of £994,000;
- Identified carbon savings of 2,700 tonnes of CO₂.

“We found this site visit and audit report extremely helpful as it identified 63% GHG savings. Our Environment Group will be looking at staff behavioural changes and Carbon Literacy training as well as plans to replace the old heating system in our largest building” Allan Myatt, Ormiston

Families

Our Environmental Net Zero Business Advisor services have:

- Supported 2,711 businesses in improving energy efficiency;
- Identified financial savings of £3.23mn;
- Identified carbon savings of 18,528 tonnes of CO₂ annually.

This ensures all small businesses can access the trusted knowledge that is regularly identified as a key barrier to their decarbonisation. It is supplemented by initiatives targeting more specific needs, such as the visitor economy and high energy users and grants for green innovation.

This collaboration between councils and business enables knowledge-sharing, accelerates progress and helps everyone tackle the problem despite a difficult economic climate.

3. Working with working with schools, colleges or universities on sustainability and decarbonisation

Acknowledging that education establishments, high users of energy, face barriers to reducing energy use due to limited finance and staff capacity, SPSL provided £245,000 in 2024 for a 2-year programme to enable tailored support, guidance and training to engage schools with decarbonisation.

A. Suffolk Sustainable Schools Network.

Launched in September 2024 to provide support and guidance on sustainability initiatives and sharing best practice. Impacts to date include:

- 265 contacts from 150 different trusts, schools, colleges and sustainability organisations;
- Half-termly network meetings and newsletters;
- Collaboration with 30+ organisations;
- 6 online network meetings have engaged 150+ network members.

B. Free Energy Audits.

Working with Groundwork, energy audits are offered to secondary schools and colleges to quantify high-level carbon emissions and identify potential cost and carbon savings. All schools receive a site visit, review of energy and water usage, an energy audit report and follow up meeting to support plans for decarbonisation.

Impacts to date include:

- Supporting 18 schools;
 - Identified financial savings of £712,088;
 - Identified carbon savings of 1,287 tonnes of CO₂.
-

“We wanted to reduce our energy costs and emissions and the audits we received helped us to decide which actions to focus on first” Phil Williams,

Thurston Sixth

C. Teacher Training and Outreach Work.

The Schools Sustainability Team have delivered dedicated training sessions for school leaders and teachers. They have:

- Engaged 100+ headteachers, operational, teaching and support staff;
- 80% of secondary schools supported;
- Facilitated 10 in-person teacher training and outreach sessions;
- Delivered a Sustainability in Education conference, attended by 70 school leaders and teachers from 32 Suffolk schools.

D. Youth Climate Conference.

Since 2023 the Partnership has organised an annual Youth Climate Conference, a launchpad for collaborative action across all sectors. Funded through partner contributions and business sponsorship, secondary school students and their teachers gather to learn how to turn their enthusiasm into climate action.

Educators take part in dedicated teacher training sessions. In 2025, these were led by the Sustainable Schools team and Let's Go Zero, focusing on embedding climate action into teaching and school life.

Student workshops have covered a range of topics from electric vehicles to nature-based solutions, coastal adaptation to plastic pollution and sustainable fashion to climate anxiety. Guest speakers have included Steve Backshall, Lord Deben, Chris Packham and Kids Against Plastic.

The event costs £9,000 each year to run, but through sponsorship and in-kind contributions, the cost to each local authority has been c£800 a year.

“ THE DAY WAS INVALUABLE FOR THE NORTHGATE STUDENTS. TO BE ABLE TO BUILD ON THEIR CLIMATE CHANGE KNOWLEDGE IN THE PROFESSIONAL AND COLLABORATIVE SETTING THAT THE CONFERENCE OFFERED WAS A FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITY. THE TALKS...WERE SO INSPIRING, MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO BE CHANGE MAKERS AND CONTRIBUTORS TO CLIMATE CHANGE SOLUTIONS. ”

RYAN GRAVER, GEOGRAPHY TEACHER AT NORTHGATE HIGH SCHOOL

Impacts to date include:

- 550 students from 27 secondary schools have attended;
- Connections with over 50 different community organisations, charities and businesses through the “Green Futures” area;
- Improved partnership working between businesses and community groups with schools;
- Feedback surveys and lesson learnt discussions with staff, teachers, pupils and attending organisations, has enabled us to improve year on year.

This collaboration between the Partnership and schools enables knowledge-sharing, accelerates progress and helps everyone tackle the problem despite difficult funding circumstances, curriculum pressures and reduced resources.

4. Actively engaging residents or communities

The Partnership supports Suffolk's Communities on their sustainability journey through support, funding, events and training, and projects on the ground which help residents reduce their carbon, save money and improve their health. SCCP has helped local groups access over £1mn in funding since 2023.

A. Suffolk Community Network.

The network, established in 2023, now brings together over 160 community groups, parish, and town councils working on sustainability and environmental projects. It supports groups in their net zero journey by:

- Signposting to grants and funding;
- Providing practical and specialist support;
- Offering networking opportunities for groups to share experiences.

B. Suffolk Community Energy Network.

SPSL and SCCP provided £136,400 and £35,300 respectively to run a 3-year Community Energy Pathways programme concluding in 2026. A growing network of community energy groups, covering 28 villages, are now working to ensure residents are at the heart of the energy transition in Suffolk. It promotes shared learning and resources to help communities participate in and benefit from community energy projects.

C. Keep the Heat

“Keep the Heat” is a community project run by SCCP, that allows groups to borrow thermal imaging cameras for free, for up to 4 weeks to help identify heat loss in homes in their local community. The goal is to raise awareness of energy efficiency and help households stay warmer while reducing energy bills, and carbon emissions. Cameras are stored with volunteer hosts across the county, reducing transport emissions.

Following a small pilot in 2022, this project is now an annual fixture. The partnership has now introduced Thermal Cameras for loan to individual residents through collaboration with Suffolk Libraries.

The partnership has worked with councils around the country to learn best practice, and feedback surveys and discussions with community groups and residents has enabled us to improve year on year. The Council has also shared its own learning and project resources with other local authorities.

The project is very cost effective, as once cameras have been purchased and training resources produced, they can be used year on year. Each camera costs under £400. The project has cost around £3k pa as cameras have been upgraded and purchased to meet demand.

The partnership also received £10k in funding from UK Power Networks towards this project to help focus on homes eligible for Warm Homes Suffolk, a highly successful fuel poverty reduction service run in collaboration by all Suffolks LAs.

In November 2024, the partnership introduced: an online booking system; cameras for each LA to use internally, as well as a leaflet for every surveyed property signposting to:

1. Warm Homes;
2. Suffolk Loft Insulation scheme (which SCCP manages);
3. Suffolk 0% Green Loan;
4. Suffolk Retrofit Voucher scheme;
5. Mid Suffolk Cosy Homes grant.

This project has enabled:

- 153 groups to take part in the last 3 years;
- 1818 homes surveyed;
- 63% of residents whose homes were identified as needing energy efficiency improvements, made at least one upgrade;
- Value for money costing each LA just £500 pa.

The domestic energy efficiency and fuel poverty reduction work aligns with the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which makes clear links between housing quality and health.

This collaboration between the Partnership and community groups empowers local people, builds community resilience, and addresses specific challenges such as net zero, fuel poverty and helps everyone tackle the problem and impact of climate change despite difficult funding circumstances.

How the partnership demonstrates good practice

Strong Collaborative Model - The Partnership unites all local authorities, public sector bodies and community organisations under a shared Net Zero goal. This cross-sector collaboration ensures consistency and maximises resources.

Clear Governance and Funding Structure - Annual contributions from each LA and successful leverage of external funding (£17m to date) demonstrate financial sustainability and scalability.

Holistic Approach to Climate Action - Tackles multiple dimensions: carbon reduction, energy efficiency, climate resilience and social equity. Integrates schools, businesses and communities, ensuring benefits reach all demographics.

Evidence of Impact - Demonstrates cost-effectiveness and quantifiable outcomes.

Innovative Engagement - Youth Climate Conference, Sustainable Schools Network and Community Energy Pathways foster long-term cultural change and empower local action.

Knowledge Sharing and Replicability - Quarterly best-practice meetings, site visits and networks (schools, community, energy) create a learning ecosystem that other councils can replicate.

Lessons for Other Local Authorities and Councillors

Invest in Partnerships: Pooling resources across councils reduces duplication and builds capacity for larger projects.

Secure Diverse Funding: Combine LA contributions with external grants and sponsorship to scale initiatives.

Embed Education: Target schools and youth to create generational change and future-proof climate action.

Measure and Share Impact: Collect data on financial and carbon savings to justify investment and attract further funding.

Empower Communities: Low-cost, high-impact projects like thermal camera loans build trust and deliver tangible benefits.

Create Networks: Facilitate forums for schools, businesses, and community groups to share best practice and collaborate.

6.4 Westmorland and Furness Council

‘Delivering low carbon heating solutions and decarbonised buildings’

Background

Westmorland and Furness Council serve one of the largest and most geographically varied areas in the UK, from Barrow in Furness to the Lake District and Eden Valley. The council has set an ambitious target of achieving net zero Scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2037, supported by their Carbon Management Strategy 2024–2029. This strategy won and was shortlisted for multiple national green energy awards during 2025.

Heating and energy use from council buildings, including offices, schools, leisure centres, libraries and community hubs, form a major portion of operational emissions. To tackle this, the council is driving a comprehensive, fabric first and renewable enabled decarbonisation programme across its entire estate, while assisting communities, schools and partners to follow suit, including carrying out heat network feasibility studies across the council area.

The council’s leadership is characterised by data driven planning, combining energy management software with condition surveys and heat decarbonisation plans to create a detailed understanding of the estate to prioritise projects that can deliver the greatest carbon and cost savings. This is supported by their Sustainable Building Strategy, approved in Autumn 2025, which provides technical guidance for how building renovation projects should be managed.

Overview

Westmorland and Furness Council have carried out an £84,000 Heat Network Zoning Technical and Feasibility Study, which supports the Council’s Net Zero 2037 target by identifying and prioritising zones where low-carbon heat networks can provide the most cost-effective decarbonisation solution.

The study funded by Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) is delivered by the Centre for Sustainable Energy and Sustainable Energy Ltd. Running until December 2025, the two-phase study first maps and refines potential heat network zones across the council area and then develops detailed RIBA Stage 2 concept designs and financial models for the highest priority zone.

Outputs will include zoning reports, GIS datasets, techno-economic models and an investor prospectus to inform future investment decisions. The study will assess the technical and financial feasibility of low-carbon heat networks, demonstrating their potential to reduce CO₂e emissions and energy costs compared to counterfactual systems.

Early stakeholder engagement and risk management are embedded throughout to ensure deliverability and investment readiness. Currently, the project is in the zone finalisation stage, with one strategic zone identified via the National Zoning Model and another identified through local stakeholder engagement.

Approach

To deliver meaningful change, the Council has invested in the development of a robust Energy Management System (EMS) to monitor, manage, and reduce energy consumption across its estate. This system provides a consistent framework for collecting, analysing, and reporting energy data, helping identify opportunities for decarbonisation and track progress against carbon reduction targets.

Alongside this, comprehensive condition surveys and heat decarbonisation plans have been completed for key operational buildings, creating a detailed understanding of their current performance, fabric condition and heating systems. This evidence base supports prioritisation of projects that will yield the greatest carbon and cost savings.

The Council is taking an iterative approach to improving its data quality, continually refining information through on-site assessments, sub-metering and benchmarking. This evolving dataset deepens understanding of how buildings perform in practice, ensuring that

future investment decisions are based on real performance rather than assumptions.

The insights gained from this work are now directly informing the implementation of the Council's Asset Management Strategy. By combining carbon, condition and utilisation data, the Council can make informed decisions on the rationalisation of its corporate estate, focusing on retaining, improving or disposing of buildings in a way that reduces emissions and operational costs.

This integrated approach ensures that decarbonisation is not seen as a stand-alone exercise but as a key driver in shaping a more efficient, and fit-for-purpose estate.

Building Decarbonisation Delivery

Westmorland and Furness Council is transitioning from fossil fuels to zero carbon and low carbon heat sources, using technologies such as heat pumps, solar PV and intelligent lighting systems to reduce energy demand and emissions.

A flagship example is the £1.75 million Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) project awarded in 2025 for works at Kendal Leisure Centre, Appleby Leisure Centre, Kendal Market and South Lakeland House. The PSDS, administered by Salix for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, enables public authorities to decarbonise their estates while reducing costs.

All four buildings will have gas boilers replaced with air source heat pumps, alongside additional measures, such as plant room pipe insulation at Appleby Leisure Centre, a pool cover at Kendal Leisure Centre and solar PV, either to be installed or already installed, at each building. The Council is match-funding capital works, bringing total investment to over £2 million and projecting annual savings of 343.2 tCO₂e.

Accepting funding from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme directly supports the council's carbon reduction strategy. These works will make a measurable impact on Scope 1 and 2 emissions, taking

Westmorland and Furness Council closer to their 2037 net zero goal. As an example, the PSDS funded works at Kendal Market and South Lakeland House alone will cut emissions by an estimated 53 tCO₂e.

This builds upon earlier investment in solar generation, including a 2.162 MWp solar farm at Sandscale Park, Barrow, with 3,969 modules producing renewable electricity to power Council operations and electric heat infrastructure.

Works Underway: Leisure Centres

Work has either completed or is underway as part of a major overhaul of council owned leisure centre decarbonisation.

A project to make Appleby and Penrith Leisure Centres more energy efficient and sustainable completed in summer 2025, thanks to funding of £1 million from a combination of Sport England's Swimming Pool Support Fund and the council's maintenance budget.

At Penrith Leisure Centre, essential roofing repairs were carried out and additional solar photovoltaic (PV) panels were installed to help generate clean energy on-site, reducing both carbon emissions and operational costs.

Both centres benefitted from upgraded, high-performance triple-glazing for their swimming pool windows, improving comfort for users and staff, reducing the time it takes to get up to temperature in the morning and minimising external noise.

These works support key priorities in the Westmorland and Furness Council Plan, especially the council's commitment to sustainability, public wellbeing and climate resilience and have the potential to bring financial savings to the council and taxpayers. They also align with the council's clear pathway to decarbonising buildings, set out in the Climate Action Plan, Carbon Management Strategy, Strategic Asset Management Strategy and Sustainable Buildings Strategy.

Phase 2 of the upgrade programme will see SPSF funded solar PV being installed at Appleby Leisure Centre, plus an air source heat pump funded through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.

Barrow Park Leisure Centre has also benefited from a Sport England funded pool cover, to reduce heat loss overnight from the pool and will soon benefit from the installation of an air source heat pump, rooftop solar PV and gas boiler replacement. This is expected to save 161.5 tCO₂e annually.

Kendal Leisure Centre has received further Public Sector Decarbonisation Funding, with works planned to improve energy performance, including installation of new pool covers, solar PV and air source heat pumps.

This next phase will continue the council's mission to reduce emissions across their buildings and assets, making local leisure centres fit for the future.

Decarbonising Schools

In 2025, Westmorland and Furness Council was awarded £350,000 from the Low Carbon Skills Fund (LCSF), delivered by Salix, to carry out a major decarbonisation assessment across 67 maintained schools.

Specialist teams completed the first stage of assessments, collecting data on fabric condition, heating systems, and energy use. The next phase involves producing individual heat decarbonisation plans and building condition surveys for each school.

The final reports will set out how existing heating systems can be replaced with low carbon electrical alternatives, enhanced insulation and on-site renewables such as solar PV. The assessments will also help identify opportunities for energy cost savings and additional grant funding for delivery works.

The council's £5.046 million annual school maintenance budget must be spent in ways that are sustainable and energy efficient. These surveys will inform future investment and cut carbon emissions across the Westmorland and Furness education portfolio.

Reducing a school's carbon footprint benefits both the environment

and the wider community. This systematic approach to school estate decarbonisation, covering diverse rural and urban sites, many off grid or historic, demonstrates leadership and scalability.

Tackling Historic Buildings

The Council's portfolio includes Victorian schools, heritage civic buildings and off grid properties typical of rural Cumbria. Westmorland and Furness Council's decarbonisation programme addresses these challenges through a 'fabric first' methodology, upgrading insulation, glazing and controls before replacing heating systems.

For example, Appleby Leisure Centre is in a conservation area and Kendal Market Hall is a listed building, these have both required additional consideration to ensure the character of the building and the surrounding area is not affected by the decarbonisation projects.

The Council's Sustainable Building Strategy now mandates energy efficiency and renewable energy considerations in all projects, ensuring that even historic and remote buildings can participate in the low carbon transition.

Challenges Overcome

- Aging, mixed-use estate: From Victorian schools to 1970s leisure centres, many buildings required bespoke solutions;
- Remote/off grid properties: Rural areas lacking gas networks prompted emphasis on electrification and renewables in order to reduce oil consumption;
- Funding complexity: Multiple overlapping schemes demanded skilled coordination and match funding; Westmorland and Furness Council secured over £2.5 million in external support in 2024–25 alone;
- Operational continuity: Projects like Kendal Car Park's LED lighting upgrade were phased to maintain public access and the delivery of works at Penrith and Appleby Leisure Centres was timetables around popular morning and evening public pool use, demonstrating delivery excellence;
- Cultural shift: Training and engagement of site managers, teachers and community users promote behavioural change alongside technology.

Wider Benefits and Community Impact

Beyond carbon reduction, the approach delivers:

- Healthier, safer buildings: Better lighting, heating, and air quality in leisure and education settings;
- Lower operating costs: Savings from LED, solar PV and heat pump systems offset capital investment, supporting financial resilience;
- Educational value: Schools involved in decarbonisation act as living classrooms for sustainability awareness;
- Economic opportunity: Local contractors and renewable energy specialists engaged in retrofit works;
- Community leadership: Publicly visible projects (solar farms, car park lighting) enhance public confidence in climate action.

The Heat Network Zoning and Feasibility Study will deliver multi-faceted benefits:

- Substantial CO₂e savings: Versus individual building-by-building replacement;
- Levelised heat costs: Undercutting conventional gas and electric alternatives;
- Detailed profiling and designs: To attract private finance and grant funding.

The Westmorland and Furness Council vision is to be a great place to live, work and thrive, and to provide leadership in the drive to become carbon net zero.

Next Steps and Legacy

The next phase of delivery (2025–2027) will focus on:

- Implementing individual heat decarbonisation plans for schools and corporate buildings;
- Completing PSDS projects and expanding heat pump rollout;
- Continuing to generate renewable power at Sandscale Park Solar Farm for the local grid and additional solar farm developments are in the pipeline;
- Expanding the smart meter network to all major council sites;
- Using performance data to prioritise remaining high emission assets for retrofit and to rationalise the estate;

- Ensuring the Sustainable Buildings Strategy is embedded across council teams to embed low carbon design and climate adaptation in every refurbishment and new build project.

Through these actions, Westmorland and Furness Council is embedding a permanent legacy of low carbon design, ensuring long term reductions in energy demand and emissions.



6.5 Dorset Council

'Powering Dorset's clean energy future'

Overview

Dorset Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and has since committed to becoming a net zero council by 2035 and achieving a net zero county by 2045. These ambitious targets demand bold, innovative action on clean power generation. Dorset Council has risen to this challenge by delivering one of the largest public sector decarbonisation programmes in the UK, investing in renewable energy at scale, and empowering communities and businesses to join the transition.

Through strategic investment, innovative delivery, and strong collaboration, the council is transforming its estate and influencing the wider energy landscape. From installing solar PV across council buildings to supporting businesses and households through dedicated programmes, Dorset Council is demonstrating how local authorities can lead the clean power revolution.

Harnessing solar power across Dorset

At the heart of Dorset Council's clean power ambition is solar energy. The council has successfully installed 6MW of solar PV across 113 buildings, including schools, libraries, leisure centres, offices, and care homes. This deployment generates an estimated 4.6 million kWh of clean electricity annually, saving £520,000 per year on energy costs and significantly reducing carbon emissions.

This achievement represents a fundamental shift in how Dorset Council powers its operations and has contributed to a 46% reduction in its annual grid electricity demand. By turning rooftops into energy assets, the council is reducing reliance on fossil fuels, cutting bills, and creating a revenue stream through the Smart Export Guarantee (SEG). Initial forecasts suggest SEG income of £40,000–£150,000 per year, which can be reinvested into future climate initiatives.

The solar programme has also delivered wider benefits:

- Energy security: local generation reduces exposure to volatile energy markets;
- Carbon reduction: thousands of tonnes of CO₂ saved annually;
- Socio-economic impact: creation of green jobs and support for local contractors.

Case Study: [Thorner's Primary School](#)

Nestled in Dorset's Bride Valley, Thorner's Primary School is a rural village school dating back to the 1600s. Its old and hard-to-heat buildings are off the main gas grid, making them heavily reliant on fossil fuels and expensive to run. Keen to reduce this reliance and align with its environmental ethos, headteacher Mike and the school's eco-committee turned to Dorset Council for support.

With support from the council and the government-funded public sector decarbonisation scheme (PSDS), solar panels were installed in summer 2022. The impact has been immediate for the school, energy bills have fallen, carbon emissions have dropped, and pupils are learning first-hand about renewable energy.

Hear more about the project and its impact from headteacher Mike, in this short video: https://youtu.be/OqBjCA_bbNI

This project demonstrates how Dorset Council's solar programme is not only cutting emissions but also inspiring the next generation to take climate action.

Future expansion and innovation

Dorset Council's clean power journey is far from over. The next phase of solar deployment will add 2.25MW of PV across 41 buildings by 2025–26, generating 1.9 million kWh annually, saving £210,000 per year, and creating £25,000–£75,000 in SEG income. All sites will be future-proofed for heat pumps, ensuring long-term sustainability.

Beyond rooftops, the council is bringing forward plans for a significant solar energy project at Higher South Buckland Farm, Chickerell, a site that has been identified as requiring diversification to remain viable and

deliver public value. This project forms part of wider ambitions to unlock 10's MW of additional solar capacity across the council's estate, delivering further carbon savings and income through Power Purchase Agreements while supporting Dorset's rural economy.

At a strategic level, Dorset Council is a key member of the Dorset Clean Energy Super Cluster (DCESC), driving the Government's missions on Growth and Clean Power under the UK's modern industrial strategy, Invest 2035. Dorset's unique geography and deepwater port at Portland position it as a hub for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), with an estimated £28 billion investment opportunity.

Investment opportunities centred around Portland include:

- offshore wind in the English Channel and a deepwater hub for construction and servicing;
- carbon capture and storage (CCS) and clean hydrogen import and storage;
- grid improvements, floating solar, desalination, and green hydrogen production.

The Super Cluster aims to:

- facilitate the delivery of 2GW of offshore wind, powering over 3 million homes;
- lock away up to 1 gigatonne of CO₂ and store 1 billion standard m³ (bcm) of hydrogen;
- generate £17.2 billion in development and construction expenditure, generate £5.4 billion UK GVA boost;
- support 20,000 construction jobs and up to 1,600 jobs in operational stages, creating £100 million GVA annually.

This ambitious programme will position Dorset as a national leader in clean energy, combining local delivery with global-scale innovation.

Empowering businesses and communities

Clean power isn't just for council sites. Dorset Council launched Dorset Solar Together in August 2025, a group-buying scheme enabling residents to install solar panels at reduced cost. By leveraging economies

of scale and trusted procurement, the council is breaking down barriers to adoption and helping households take climate action. The scheme has already attracted over 1500 expressions of interest, demonstrating strong community appetite for renewable energy.

For businesses and community organisations, the council's [Low Carbon Dorset](#) programme has been transformative. This initiative provides free technical advice and grant funding to support energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. To date:

- Over 1100 applications for support, more than 700 given technical advice on clean energy solutions, leading to 296 completed low carbon projects across the county;
- £7.5 million in grants awarded towards projects worth £20 million;
- Enabled the installation of 16MW of renewable energy capacity, including solar PV on commercial and community buildings;
- Delivered 38,500 tonnes of CO₂ savings.

Projects supported by Low Carbon Dorset range from solar installations on factory roofs to Dorset's first [green hydrogen production facility](#), showcasing how local authorities can catalyse innovation and investment in clean power.

Case study: [Hazelmead eco-development](#)

Located in the west of the county is a cohousing development of 53 eco homes.

Each house in this inspirational neighbourhood has been designed to be high quality, affordable, energy efficient and resilient to the impacts of climate change. High levels of insulation, solar panels and heat pumps help reduce their footprint and keep bills low for occupants.

With support from the council's Low Carbon Dorset programme, the site also hosts the south west's largest 'microgrid', a small-scale electricity network which connects all 53 homes. Thanks to the microgrid, the solar power generated by each house can be shared across the whole neighbourhood.

This site is a truly affordable, net-zero development brought to life by Bridport Cohousing, Bournemouth Churches Housing Association, Dorset Council and micro-grid developer Cepro.

Learn more about the project and hear from Damon, CEO of Cepro, in this short video: [Our Journey to Net Zero Exhibition - Hazelmead eco-development](#)

Supporting hard-to-treat buildings

Listed and historic buildings present unique challenges for clean energy and heat decarbonisation in the county. Dorset Council has taken a proactive approach to ensure heritage and sustainability go hand in hand. As part of its planning framework, the council introduced a [Sustainability Checklist](#) for planning applications, helping applicants demonstrate how proposals align with energy efficiency, renewable integration and sustainable design objectives. By embedding these requirements into planning processes, Dorset Council ensures that even heritage properties can contribute to clean energy goals without compromising their historic character.

Alongside policy innovation, the council has published detailed [guidance on energy efficiency for listed buildings](#) and worked closely with conservation officers and specialist contractors to deliver practical solutions and case studies.

Successful heritage projects supported by the council within Dorset include:

- **Durlston Castle:** Integrated a large solar array and heat pumps into a grade II listed building while preserving historic integrity;
- **Athelhampton House and South Shore Lodge:** Demonstrated how solar PV and efficiency measures can be sensitively applied to Grade 1 listed heritage sites;
- **Sherborne Abbey:** Installed a hybrid heat pump system and reactivated underfloor heating, overcoming technical and conservation challenges.

These projects show that even the most complex and conservation-sensitive buildings can transition to clean energy with the right expertise and collaborative approach. Dorset Council's work in this area provides a replicable model for other authorities facing similar challenges.

Case study: [Sherborne Abbey](#)

Once the site of a Saxon cathedral, Sherborne Abbey has stood for centuries as a symbol of heritage and history. Today, it is also a symbol of climate innovation. Hidden out of sight on the abbey's historic roof is a cluster of heat pumps, working tirelessly to produce renewable heat for the vast hall below.

With support from the council's Low Carbon Dorset programme, this project was able to overcome significant challenges, including conservation requirements and technical constraints, to deliver a solution that respects the abbey's historic character while reducing emissions. It is a powerful example of how even the most complex and sensitive spaces can adapt to the demands of a changing climate.

As the project team noted, Sherborne Abbey's retrofit is "a lesson to us all that even in the most challenging of spaces, steps can be taken to tackle emissions."

Hear more about the project from one of the abbey's vergers, Chris, here: <https://youtu.be/sC9oBNq-wBQ?si=Mj-7N39B7gkOLohO>

Collaboration at the heart of delivery

Dorset Council's success is built on partnerships:

- **Public sector teams** worked together to deliver complex installations across schools, libraries, leisure centres, offices and care homes;
- **Private sector contractors** provided specialist expertise for solar PV design and installation;
- **Community engagement** ensured buy-in from residents and businesses, supported by clear communications and guidance;
- **Knowledge sharing** through case studies, exhibitions, and online resources inspires replication across the public and private sectors.

These collaborations have created a strong local supply chain, supporting green jobs and skills development in Dorset.

Impact and benefits

The impact of Dorset Council's clean power initiatives is significant:

- **Carbon reduction:** thousands of tonnes of CO₂ saved annually from council operations and wider community uptake. Carbon emissions from council buildings alone have reduced by 45% since 2019;
- **Financial savings:** over £500,000 annual savings from reduced grid demand, plus SEG income;
- **Energy security:** Local generation reduces reliance on imported energy and stabilises costs;
- **Socio-economic gains:** Creation of green jobs, support for local contractors, and improved resilience for households and businesses.

A blueprint for local authority action

Dorset Council has demonstrated that local authorities can lead the clean power revolution. By deploying solar at scale, supporting businesses and communities through Low Carbon Dorset and embedding sustainability into planning for listed buildings, the council is delivering real benefits for people, planet and place. This is clean power in action; strategic, collaborative and transformative.



6.6 Hackney Council

'Powering the transition to EVs in Hackney'

Overview

Hackney Council is delivering one of the UK's most ambitious EV charging rollouts: a borough-wide scheme to install over 2,500 on-street chargers by 2026. Developed in partnership with Zest and ESB, two of the UK's leading charge point operators (CPOs), the project is designed to accelerate EV adoption and promote sustainable urban mobility.

Background

Hackney Council recognises that two-thirds of residents don't have access to off-street parking, making on-street charging essential to accelerate EV adoption. The chargepoint network ensures every neighbourhood - especially those in dense housing or low-income areas - has reliable access to EV charging, supporting modal shift and social equity. To ensure inclusivity, a minimum target of 10% of all electric vehicle charging points to be installed is allocated to serve estate residents.

Hackney now has one of the UK's most accessible and equitable EV charging networks. The 1300+ charge points already serve 1,900 unique monthly users. By driving demand, Hackney's partnership with the CPOs ensures equitable distribution of chargers at a scale and pace to meet the demands of residents and businesses alike, who have raised over 2,400 requests for EV charging.

Actions

Installing hundreds of chargers in a dense urban environment requires innovative engineering and effective management of chargepoint installation complexities. Hackney Council first worked intensively with the CPOs to identify and map potential locations for the EV charge points in order to create a cohesive network map. This allowed the Council to present the vision for the network to residents and ask them to contribute to new charge point locations by completing an online form to request a charge point on their street. The respective CPOs' technical teams collaborated with the council to assess locations for their suitability to

enable rapid deployment without compromising streetscapes, other sustainable mobility schemes, or accessibility, thereby promoting wider sustainable urban mobility. By aligning with local bike lane and pedestrian improvements, the scheme underpins a broader reimagining of public streets: cleaner, safer and less car-dependent.

Collaboration

Hackney Council's specialist EV team also works alongside car club provider Zipcar to provide EV car clubs, a measure intended to expand shared mobility within the borough. Thanks to over £1 million in combined funding from the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Pilot Fund and EV charging operator Zest the Council is working to expand EV infrastructure for car clubs. This collaboration will result in 35 electric car club vehicles in Hackney. The integration of dedicated fast charging stations for car club vehicles supports car club operators to break down the operational barriers to expanding electric vehicles in their fleet. Thus providing a scalable model to help the Council achieve its aim for 50% of all car club vehicles in Hackney to be electric by 2026.

To incorporate innovation, the charging infrastructure is powered by 100% renewable energy sources, contributing to both emissions reduction at source and improved local air quality. Hackney Council has also collaborated with Hackney Light and Power (HLP), the council's clean energy services team, with an ambition to integrate excess power from Council owned solar projects with both CPOs' renewable-only energy supply to decarbonise all local energy use.

Outcomes

With over 1000 new Zest charge points having been installed across the borough, there has been a 1,350% increase in charging activity - up from 200,000 minutes in May 2024 to 2.9 million minutes in June 2025. Hackney Council and Zest will continue to maintain scalability, improving performance and efficiency as the chargepoint network expands in size and functionality.

The first ESB charge points are scheduled to be commissioned by the end of 2025, greatly expanding the rapid charge point network, and serving

professional drivers and the night-time economy.

The EV team ensures every new site meets consistent design and reliability standards to maintain quality and scalability. By overseeing installation, grid connection, and commissioning directly, the CPOs remove fragmentation from the process, ensuring a better, faster and more reliable rollout. Hackney Council oversees the rollout of chargepoints, ensuring no kerbside clashes through collaborative planning, and engages with residents and other key stakeholders throughout the entire process.

Bays are designed to prioritise convenience and inclusivity. A crucial aspect of each site's design is the implementation of dedicated bays marked 'EV charging only.' This policy significantly reduces the potential for these spaces to be occupied by internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles, thereby enhancing the availability and user experience of the charging network for EV drivers. A core focus of the design was to install the charge points directly within the carriageway, ensuring that pavements remain clear and unobstructed. This approach prioritises the safety and mobility of all pedestrians, especially those with restricted mobility.

The EV team also prioritises constant improvement. Resident feedback directly informs service updates and charger placements. The EV charge point network map is iteratively refined in collaboration with Zest, Hackney Council and local communities, ensuring responsiveness to evolving needs.

Most recently, the partnership has successfully secured an additional £1.36 million from the OZEV LEVI capital fund to focus on communities currently underserved by EV investment, including residents living in council estates, people who don't own a car but need access to one and disabled drivers.

A cornerstone of the partnership's equity mission was the introduction of a discounted EV charging tariff for Hackney Light and Power (HLP) customers. This ensures that lower-income residents - those least able to access private home charging - can still benefit from affordable, reliable public charging.

Zest has also invested in over 28 community initiatives and 900 volunteer hours, supporting education, skills and green jobs across Hackney. This includes partnering with local colleges to deliver green careers seminars and providing training to ex-offenders and long-term unemployed residents.

In collaboration, Hackney Zest and ESB are setting a new standard for EV charging infrastructure: socially inclusive, sustainable and replicable at a national scale. By mid-2025, the network was serving 1,900 unique users per month, a 700% increase in 12 months, indicating strong user experience and growing EV confidence.

Hackney's expanding public EV charging network directly supports the borough's commitment to reach net zero by 2040 and to reduce transport emissions, currently its second-largest source of carbon. The rollout of 2,500 public charge points is central to Hackney's Climate Action Plan and Transport Strategy, helping to shift the borough towards clean energy transitions.



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