

Net Zero - Strategy and Support

Research Report

October 2023 to January 2024



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Summary

Background

As the UK nears the next general election, it is important to capture local council officer's views of how central government is supporting their authorities. This report will provide details on officers' views of how central government is assisting council's climate change policy and the delivery of net zero locally.

Local government officers who oversee climate change policy, or similar areas, in all English councils (317 in total) were asked to complete an online survey. The survey was run in two batches. First in October and November 2023, and then in January and February 2024. In total, there were 87 responses. The final overall response rate was 27 per cent.

Key findings

- Seventy-two percent of respondents stated their council has a net zero target for the authority itself.
- Seventy per cent reported that their council has a net zero target for the area as a whole.
- Ninety-seven per cent of councils had an official target for reaching net zero for either or both the local authority itself and for the area as a whole.
- Sixty-seven per cent of councils were very or fairly unconfident their local authority will achieve its net zero targets within the timescales set out in its strategy.
- Forty per cent of respondents said not at all when asked to what extent has central government's overall work with their local council on net zero given them confidence of achieving a 'just transition'.
- Forty-six per cent reported they were not at all confident, and a further 46 per cent only confident to a small extent, that there was a sufficiently clear and scaled financing plan to deliver central government's commitment to achieve net zero by 2050.
- Ninety per cent disagreed that the funding schemes currently available for local government to help achieve net zero allowed their council to sufficiently fund their net zero strategy locally.
- Seventy-six per cent of respondents strongly or tend to have agreed that their council is concerned by the impact of inflation on the deliverability of projects within the restrictions set by a national scheme.
- Sixty-one per cent agreed that their council has, at least once, been dissuaded from submitting bids into funds due to the investment needed to develop proposals.

- Forty-three per cent of councils have, at least once, had to return funding to government due to being unable to deliver projects within the restrictions set by a national scheme.
- Fifty per cent of councils generally feel successful in bidding into national funding pots.
- Total awareness of Your Local Net Zero Hub, Heat Networks Delivery Unit, Active Travel England, and the Office for Net Zero Emissions was between 80 and 90 per cent. Sixty-two per cent of respondents were aware of Net Zero Go.
- Fifty-two per cent thought that central government's non-financial support was sufficient to a small extent and a further 16 per cent said it was not at all sufficient.

Introduction

As the next UK general election approaches, it is important to capture local council officer's view of how central government is supporting authorities in all policy areas. This includes net zero and climate change policy. With this goal in mind, the LGA has conducted a survey in this topic area. The survey asked climate change officers, or those in a similar role, about their council's net zero strategy, whether they were aware of different support schemes, and their view on how central government has supported their council to achieve its net zero targets.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by the LGA's Research and Information Team using an online questionnaire. An email containing a unique link was sent to officers, in all English councils, who oversee climate change and net zero policy (317 in total). The survey was run in two batches. First in October and November 2023, and then in January and February 2024. In total, there were 87 responses. The final overall response rate was 27 per cent.

Data has been weighted to get a full representation of all councils in England. The number provided for the base for the tables below refers to the **unweighted** number of respondents who answered each question.

Notes

Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question and the number in brackets refers to the number of respondents who answered. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey, as not all respondents answered all questions.

Where the response base is less than 50, care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore, where this is the case in this report, the non-percentage values are reported, in brackets, alongside the percentage values.

Throughout the report, percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

Response rate

Table 1 shows, by council type, the response rate was highest for county councils (48 per cent) and lowest from unitary authorities and district councils (both 24 per cent).

Table 1: Response rate by type of authority

Type of authority	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate – Per cent
County	21	10	48
District	164	40	24
London borough	33	10	30
Metropolitan district	36	12	33
Unitary authority	63	15	24

Regionally, as shown in Table 2, the response rate was highest from councils in the East Midlands (43 per cent) and lowest from councils in the North West (17 per cent).

Table 2: Response rate by region

Region	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate – Per cent
East	45	11	24
East Midlands	35	15	43
Greater London	33	10	30
North East	12	5	42
North West	35	6	17
South East	64	21	33
South West	27	7	26
West Midlands	30	9	30
Yorkshire and the Humber	15	3	20

Net zero strategy and support

This section contains analysis of the full results from the survey.

Net zero target and strategy

As Table 3 shows, respondents were asked if their authority has set an official target for reaching net zero. Seventy-two percent of respondents stated they have a target for the authority itself and roughly the same proportion (70 per cent) have one for the area as a whole. Three per cent reported that their council did not have a net zero target meaning, in total, 97 per cent of councils have an official net zero target for the authority itself, for area as a whole, or both.

Table 3: Has your authority set an official target for reaching net zero? Please select all that apply.

	Per cent
Yes	97
Yes, for the authority itself	72
Yes, for the area as a whole	70
No	3
Don't know	0

Unweighted base: All (87)

Respondents were asked how confident they were that their local authority will achieve its net zero target within the timescale set out in its strategy. Table 4 shows respondents were more likely to have stated they were not very or not at all confident (67 per cent) than were very or fairly confident (26 per cent).

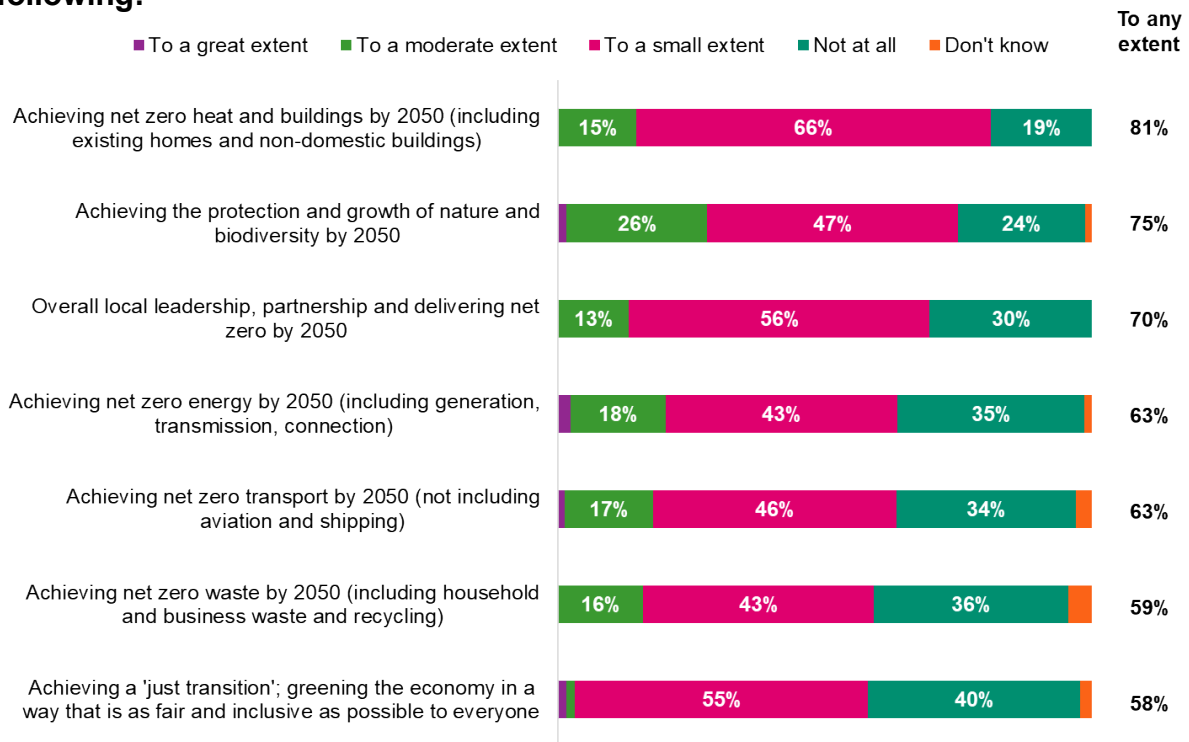
Table 4: How confident are you that your local authority will achieve its net zero targets within the timescales set out in its strategy?

Per cent	
Very or fairly confident	26
Not very or not all confident	67
Very confident	3
Fairly confident	23
Not very confident	52
Not all confident	16
Don't know	6

Unweighted base: All local councils with a net zero target for the authority and/or for the area as a whole (84)

Respondents were asked to what extent has central government's overall work with their local council on net zero given them confidence of achieving certain goals. Figure 1 shows that respondents were more likely to be confident to small extent than to a moderate or great extent across all goals. Moreover, with only one exception, councils were more likely to say they were not at all confident than confident to a moderate and great extent combined for each goal. Respondents were most likely to be confident that central government's work with their council will help them achieve net zero heat and buildings by 2050 (81 per cent). Councils were least likely to be confident that government's work in supporting them will help them achieve a 'just transition' (58 per cent).

Figure 1: To what extent, if at all, has central government’s overall work with your local council on net zero given you the confidence of achieving the following:

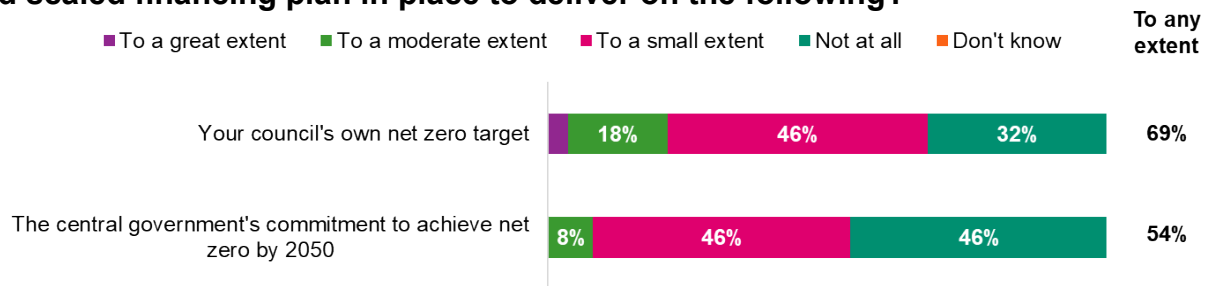


Unweighted base: (87)

Funding and support

The survey asked respondents to what extent, if at all, do they think that there is a sufficiently clear and scaled financing plan in place to deliver on their council’s own net zero target and central government 2050 net zero target. Figure 2 demonstrates that 69 per cent of councils with a net zero target for their authority or area as a whole thought, to any extent, there was a clear and scaled financing plan for their own net zero target. However, most of these responses were to a small extent (46 per cent) and 32 per cent said they were not at all confident. The survey asked whether respondents thought there is a sufficiently clear and scaled financing plan in place to deliver central government’s commitment to achieve net zero by 2050. While 54 per cent said there is sufficiently clear plan to any extent, respondents were most likely to have stated to a small extent (46 per cent). Moreover, the same percentage of respondents said not at all (46 per cent).

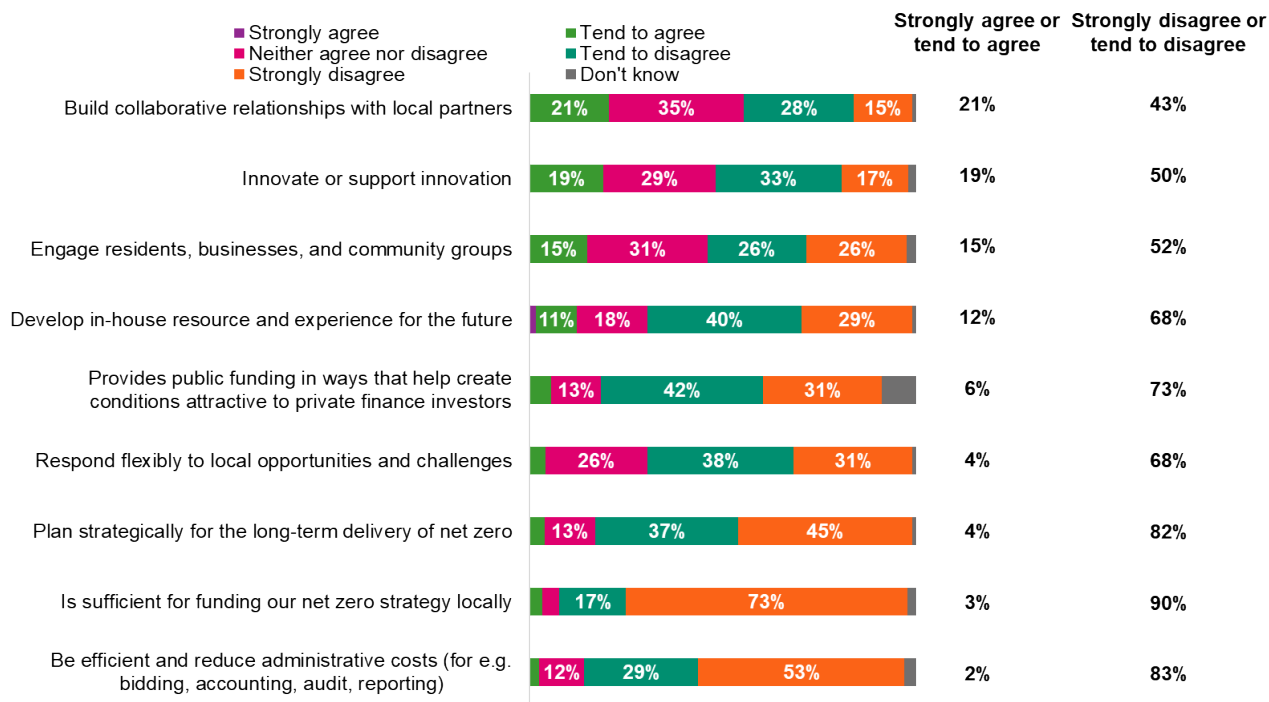
Figure 2: To what extent, if at all, do you think that there is a sufficiently clear and scaled financing plan in place to deliver on the following?



Unweighted base: (84-87)

Respondents were asked, thinking about the landscape of national funding opportunities altogether, to what extent, if at all, do they agree or disagree with the following statements related to net zero delivery. In all cases respondents were more likely to say they strongly or tend to disagree than agree across all statements in Figure 3. Respondents were most likely to have strongly or tended to agree that funding schemes currently available for local government to help achieve net zero allowed their council to build collaborative relationships with local partners (21 per cent). Respondents were most likely to strongly or tend to disagree that the funding schemes available to local government were sufficient for funding their net zero strategy locally (90 per cent), followed by a disagreement that it enables them to be efficient in reducing administrative costs (83 per cent).

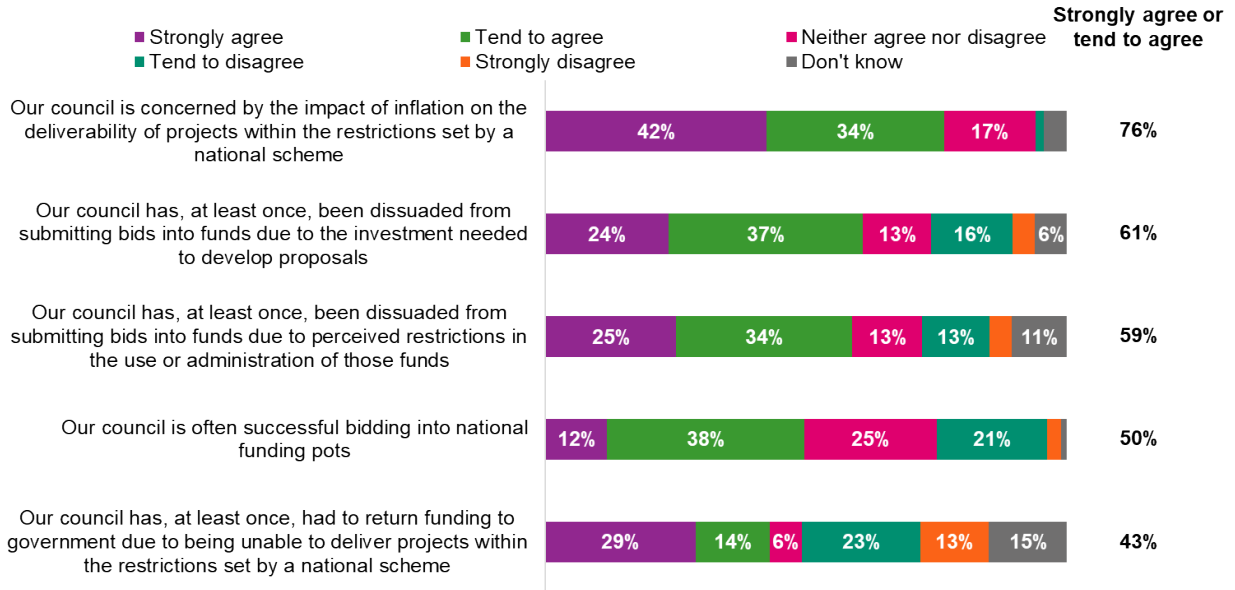
Figure 3: Thinking about the landscape of national funding opportunities altogether, to what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following? The funding schemes currently available for local government to help achieve net zero allows my council to...



Unweighted base: (87)

Responding councils were asked by the survey, while thinking about your own council's interaction with national schemes supporting net zero action over the last three years, to what extent did they agree about certain issues relating to funding. Three-quarters (76 per cent) have strongly or tended to agree that their council is concerned by the impact of inflation on the deliverability of projects within the restrictions set by a national scheme. Sixty-one per cent agreed that their council has, at least once, been dissuaded from submitting bids into funds due to the investment needed to develop proposals, with similar dissuaded by perceived restrictions in use of funds (59 per cent). Forty-three per cent of councils have, at least once, had to return funding to government due to being unable to deliver projects within the restrictions set by a national scheme. Fifty per cent of councils generally feel successful in bidding into national funding pots.

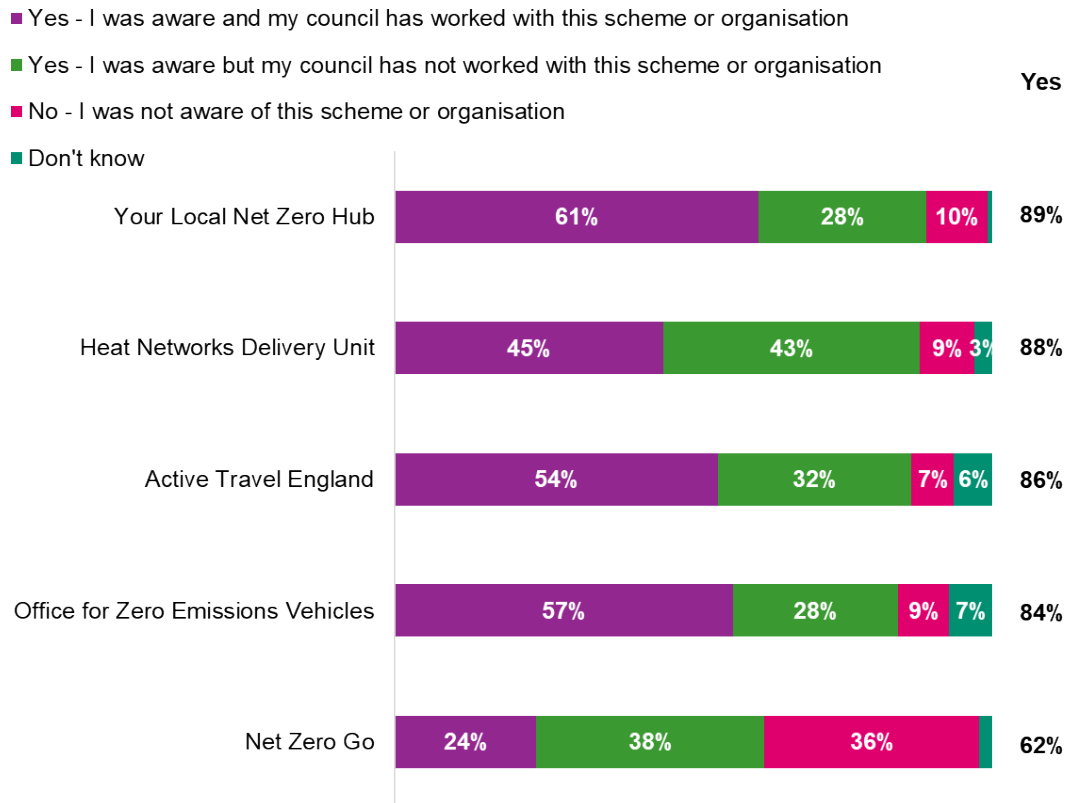
Figure 4: Thinking about your own council's interaction with national schemes supporting net zero action over the last 3 years, to what extent, if at all, do you agree with the below:



Unweighted base: (87)

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of certain schemes or organisations related to net zero. Total awareness was between 80 and 90 per cent for all schemes or organisations listed in Figure 5, with the exception of Net Zero Go which has a somewhat lower level of awareness (62 per cent). The organisations or schemes which councils were most likely to work with was Your Local Net Zero Hub (61 per cent), followed by the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (57 per cent). In contrast, 24 per cent of respondents report that their council have worked with Net Zero Go.

Figure 5: Before responding to this survey, were you aware of any of the following?



Unweighted base: (87)

Respondents were asked to what extent, if at all, do they think that central government's non-financial support available to them is sufficient to help their council play its full role in achieving net zero by 2050. As Table 5 shows, 82 per cent of councils thought that central government's non-financial support was sufficient to any extent. However, 52 per cent stated this was sufficient to a small extent and a further 16 per cent said it was not at all sufficient.

Table 5: To what extent, if at all, do you think that central government's non-financial support available to you is sufficient to help your council play its full role in achieving net zero by 2050?

	Percentage
To any extent	82
To a great extent	3
To a moderate extent	24
To a small extent	56
Not at all	16
Don't know	2

Unweighted base: All (87)

Respondents were asked if they had any other comments in helping their council deliver on local and national ambitions for net zero? Forty-six councils responded to this question, which are broken down into the themes below:

- **Lack of funds and resources:** councils consistently mentioned that the lack of funding or resources means achieving net zero has made it much more difficult. For example, multiple councils stated the importance of 'long-term' funding. For one council, a reason long-term funding was important was because the current on-off funding landscape means that supply chains have to be rebuilt repeatedly when a new tranche of funding is delivered. Another reason adequate funding was viewed as important was because money was needed for investment into staff development so they can be properly equipped with the skills to deliver their council's net zero policy.
- **Lack of alignment or collaboration between national and local government:** respondents frequently mention a lack of alignment or collaboration between national and local government was an issue when trying to deliver net zero. One responding council reported that 'there is a lack of join up between national and local targets'. Another council mentioned it makes it more difficult 'to continue conversations with businesses or organisations or develop programmes of delivery' when central government changes its net zero targets. More generally, one council said that there was 'limited joined up thinking and no real partnership approach' between local and national government.
- **Issues with the bidding process:** many respondents were critical of the process of bidding for new funding. Some councils highlighted that the process is overly complex meaning it requires a high number of resources than should be necessary. Moreover, many bids have to be done at short notice meaning councils without enough resources were put off from submitting one. Respondents also reported that the competitive nature of the bidding process pits councils against one another rather than encourage collaboration.

Annex A: Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to complete this LGA survey on climate change and net zero policy. You can navigate through the questions using the buttons at the bottom of each page. Use the 'previous' button at the bottom of the page if you wish to amend your response to an earlier question.

If you stop before completing the return, you can come back to this page using the link supplied in the email and you will be able to continue where you left off. To ensure your answers have been saved, click on the 'next' button at the bottom of the page that you were working on before exiting.

All responses will be treated confidentially. Information will be aggregated, and no individual or authority will be identified in any publications without your consent. Identifiable information may be used internally within the LGA but will only be held and processed in accordance with our privacy statement. We are undertaking this survey to aid the legitimate interests of the LGA in supporting and representing authorities.

Please amend the details we have on record if necessary.

- Name
- Authority
- Job title
- Email address

Has your authority set an official target for reaching net zero?

- Yes, for the authority itself
- Yes, for the area as a whole
- No
- Don't know

How confident are you that your local authority will achieve its net zero targets within the timescales set out in its strategy?

- Very confident
- Fairly confident
- Not very confident
- Not all confident

- Don't know

Framework - the Net Zero Strategy, and local government

The Government's Net Zero Strategy said it wanted to 'build strong partnership working between central, devolved, and local government...better support all levels of government to utilise the influences available to them... [and] empower our local leaders to take the actions which will lead to the biggest gains in emissions reduction'.

To what extent, if at all, has central government's overall work with your local council on net zero given you the confidence of achieving the following:

Column headings:

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Row headings:

- Overall local leadership, partnership and delivering net zero by 2050
- Achieving net zero transport by 2050 (not including aviation and shipping)
- Achieving net zero heat and buildings by 2050 (including existing homes and non-domestic buildings)
- Achieving net zero energy by 2050 (including generation, transmission, connection)
- Achieving net zero waste by 2050 (including household and business waste and recycling)
- Achieving the protection and growth of nature and biodiversity by 2050
- Achieving a 'just transition'; greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone

There are a range of national schemes to which councils can apply for funding to deliver projects locally, including on retrofit, heat networks, electric vehicle charging, trees and woodland, etc. Our green finance guide summarises these schemes.

To what extent, if at all, do you think that there is a sufficiently clear and scaled financing plan in place to deliver on the following?

Column headings:

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Row headings:

- Your council's own net zero target
- The Central government's commitment to achieve net zero by 2050

To what extent, if at all, has central government's overall work with your local council on net zero given you the confidence of achieving the following:

Column headings:

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

Row headings:

- Plan strategically for the long-term delivery of net zero
- Respond flexibly to local opportunities and challenges
- Build collaborative relationships with local partners
- Engage residents, businesses, and community groups
- Provides public funding in ways that help create conditions attractive to private finance investors
- Develop in-house resource and experience for the future
- Be efficient and reduce administrative costs (for e.g. bidding, accounting, audit, reporting)
- Innovate or support innovation
- Is sufficient for funding our net zero strategy locally

To what extent, if at all, has central government's overall work with your local council on net zero given you the confidence of achieving the following:

Column headings:

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

Row headings:

- Our council is often successful bidding into national funding pots
- Our council has, at least once, been dissuaded from submitting bids into funds due to perceived restrictions in the use or administration of those funds
- Our council has, at least once, been dissuaded from submitting bids into funds due to the investment needed to develop proposals
- Our council has, at least once, had to return funding to government due to being unable to deliver projects within the restrictions set by a national scheme
- Our council is concerned by the impact of inflation on the deliverability of projects within the restrictions set by a national scheme

In addition to funding, central government has established other non-financial sources of support for councils to meet net-zero objectives, such as advice, guidance, and toolkits.

Before responding to this survey, were you aware of any of the following?

Column headings:

- Yes - I was aware and my council has worked with this scheme or organisation
- Yes - I was aware but my council has not worked with this scheme or organisation
- No - I was not aware of this scheme or organisation
- Don't know

Row headings:

- Your Local Net Zero Hub
- Net Zero Go
- Heat Networks Delivery Unit
- Office for Zero Emission Vehicles
- Active Travel England

In your view, how useful was this support in helping your council achieve its net zero ambitions?

Column headings:

- Very useful
- Moderately useful
- Slightly useful
- Not at all useful
- Don't know

Row headings:

- Your Local Net Zero Hub
- Net Zero Go
- Heat Networks Delivery Unit
- Office for Zero Emission Vehicles
- Active Travel England

To what extent, if at all, do you think that central government's non-financial support available to you is sufficient to help your council play its full role in achieving net zero by 2050?

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the wider national landscape in helping your council deliver on local and national ambitions for net zero?

Thank you for completing this survey. You are in control of any personal data that you have provided to us in your response. You can contact us at all times to have your information changed or deleted. You can find our full [privacy policy](#) here.



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