

How Green is your Council?

'Think global, act local' has long been the slogan for sustainability. But few Councils are delivering Green policies as effectively as they could. Challenge offers some questions so that you can start checking your Council's performance and campaigning for improvements

We suggest that you use this list selectively, starting with the subjects that interest you most or that are of most relevance - politically or environmentally - to your area. And please feedback comments and suggestions about this checklist to *Challenge* (challenge@wncb.net), as we may publish an updated version later.

Championing sustainability

- ◆ Has the Council appointed a senior member to lead on Green issues?
- ◆ Do the Council scrutiny processes deal with Green issues on a systematic and regular basis? Are local Green groups encouraged to participate in this scrutiny work?
- ◆ Has the Council mainstreamed sustainability? Has it checked that Councillors and staff have a real understanding of what is meant by sustainability?
- ◆ Do the Council scrutiny processes deal with Green issues on a systematic and regular basis?

Benchmark performance

Chesterfield's LibDem-run Council is among the leaders in overall environmental performance: see www.paulholmes.org.uk/councilgroup.html

Climate change

- ◆ Does the Council have a climate change policy?
- ◆ Is the Council working positively to encourage the local development of energy conservation measures and renewable energy sources?
- ◆ How successful has the Council been in improving the energy efficiency of existing housing in its area?
- ◆ Has the Council set targets to reduce its own global warming emissions and are these being met?
- ◆ Is the Council encouraging householders and businesses to minimise global warming emissions?
- ◆ Has the Council adopted policies to enable the area to adapt to climate change?
- ◆ Has the Council signed the Nottingham Declaration on climate change?

Key information

Information on the performance of every Council in meeting targets to cut energy use in local housing under the Home Energy Conservation Act are available at: www.DEFRA.gov.uk/environment/energy/heca95/index.htm#Data

The Nottingham Declaration information pack is available at: www.est.org.uk/housingbuildings/localauthorities/NottinghamDeclaration

Benchmark performance

Woking Borough Council was the first in the UK to adopt a climate change strategy and is leading the way in switching to sustainable energy sources, see www.woking.gov.uk/environment/climatechangestrategy

One of the most thorough studies of adaptation policies was published by the GLA in July: see www.london.gov.uk/climatechangepartnership



Great Bow Yard is a development of 12 houses and apartments in Langport, Somerset, designed to high levels of sustainability. The homes are insulated far above normal UK standards and incorporate renewable energy sources and energy-saving devices. Materials come from sustainable sources.

Sustainable housing and construction

- ◆ Does the Local Plan/LDF include policies requiring a minimum percentage of the energy usage of the building to be met from on-site renewables (the so-called 'Merton' policy)?
- ◆ Is the Council routinely demanding EcoHomes 'Excellent' or 'Good' standards for all or most of new housing?
- ◆ Are sustainable drainage systems required where feasible in new developments?
- ◆ Is the Council actively encouraging the retrofitting of solar water heating and other renewable energy sources to existing homes?
- ◆ Does the Council require that the siting, design, layout and orientation of buildings shall have full regard to the need to reduce energy and water consumption?
- ◆ Does the Council have a policy to encourage improved efficiency in the use of water in its area?



Above: photovoltaic panels being installed on a south-facing roof



Right: A sign of things to come?

Key information

BRE has developed the BREEAM and EcoHome assessment methods: see www.bre.co.uk/service.jsp?id=51

Information on sustainable drainage can be found at www.ciria.org.uk/suds/

The Energy Saving Trust is an excellent source of best practice: see www.est.org.uk/housingbuildings/localauthorities/

Benchmark performance

LibDem-controlled Milton Keynes has pioneered a carbon-zero policy in its new Local Plan that goes beyond EcoHomes 'Excellent', demanding either zero-carbon development through efficiency and the use of renewables or, as an interim measure, requiring payments into a carbon offset fund. For details, see Policy D4 in the Design section of the plan, which can be accessed from: www.mkweb.co.uk/local%5Fplan%5Freview/DisplayArticle.asp?ID=35216

Kirklees leads

Kirklees Council has long been a leader on environmental and sustainability issues. It has developed a district-wide renewable energy strategy, established a solar thermal promotion scheme and a corporate capital grant fund for renewable energy. 79 energy efficient homes have been created where owners have invested in solar electricity panels or micro wind turbines.

Kirklees now accounts for nearly 5% of the UK's installed capacity of solar photovoltaics across schools, homes and civic buildings. It has also fitted over 160 houses with solar thermal heating and supported a 15kW wind turbine on a college.

Transport

- ◆ Does the local transport plan have clear objectives and policies that will reduce carbon emissions?
- ◆ Are walking and cycling given priority over car use in urban areas?
- ◆ Is the Council putting in bicycle stands in central places, at railway stations, bus terminii, and schools?
- ◆ Are policies in place to encourage public transport (and not just adequate services but quality information, but shelters, priority at traffic lights etc)?
- ◆ Has the Council adopted a Green travel plan for staff and councillors? Is its effectiveness measured?
- ◆ Is the Council actively campaigning for local employers to adopt Green travel plans?



Facilities for pedestrians and cyclists in urban areas often need improving

CHALLENGE SPECIAL

- ◆ Does the Local Plan/LDF require new developments to include adequate facilities for walking, cycling and public transport?

Key information

Transport 2000 provides helpful information about many aspects of Green transport, from making streets safer and more pleasant to workplace travel plans. See: www.transport2000.org.uk
The Government has set a target of all schools having adopted travel plans by 2010, with 40% having them by the end of 2006.
Two-thirds of the Councils replying to a recent LGC/Brother survey had a travel plan for their staff.

Benchmark performance

Hereford City Council (a parish council) has worked with a community group to develop a community travel plan. See: www.communitytravelplan.org/. But the plan has so far been thwarted by the County Council. However, Herefordshire is more than meeting its school travel plan target, with some 60% already having plans.

The most successful Green travel plans are currently operated by private companies. The telecomms company Orange has one of the best-established: see link at www.dft.gov.uk/intradoc-cgi/nph-idx.cgi?qckQuery=Orange+travel+plan&IdxService=GET_SEARCH_RESULTS&SrchType=q&qckSection=

Resource use

- ◆ How does the Council's recycling record compare with other local authorities?
- ◆ Is the Council's recycling rate improving? Are adequate plans in place to ensure continual improvement?
- ◆ Has the Council adopted a policy to collect organic waste for composting?
- ◆ Does the Council achieve high recycling rates in its own operations (especially offices, sports and entertainment venues)? Does it encourage local businesses to recycle?
- ◆ Does the Council have any policies for utilising waste materials in its own operations (eg using wood chippings from tree maintenance as a biofuel)?
- ◆ Does the Council have a Green procurement strategy? If so, how effective is it?
- ◆ Does the Council actively seek to buy local products where possible?
- ◆ Does the Council use lifetime costing to assess value for money when purchasing resource-intensive capital items such as buildings, lifts and air-conditioning equipment?

- ◆ Does the Council have a strong environmental policy guiding its purchase/leasing of vehicles?

Key information

The Audit Commission looks at recycling during its local authority inspections and detailed information on the results is available on its website: www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Local authority recycling and composting figures for 2004/05 can be downloaded from www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/localauth/perf_mgmt.htm

According to the LGC survey, around two-thirds of Councils have taken action to save water.

Benchmark performance

Descriptions of a wide range of projects aimed at re-using end-of-life products can be found at <http://cred.rswt.org/home/reuse.php>

Two Borough Councils - Wyre and Fylde - have joined together to boost recycling and improve the efficiency of the operation. See www.lgcawards.com for details.

Recycling/composting performance 2004/5

<u>Council</u>	<u>Recycling rate (%)</u>
Best 10	
St Edmundsbury	50.64
Forest Heath	48.59
South Cambridgeshire	46.80
Lichfield	46.35
Harborough	46.00
Rushcliffe	46.00
Daventry	45.05
Cherwell	43.40
Vale Royal	40.00
North Kesteven	39.43
Worst 10	
Trafford	10.47
Knowsley	10.39
Sunderland	10.34
Lewisham	10.20
Middlesbrough	10.16
Wirral	9.93
High Peak	9.82
Liverpool	7.63
Tower Hamlets	7.35
Newham	6.23



Bench made from recycled tyres

Education & promotion

- ◆ Does the Council use its own publications, web site etc to promote the importance of energy and water conservation and Green actions by which local people can contribute to environmental protection?
- ◆ Are local schools involved where possible in Green campaigns?
- ◆ Are schools involving their students in recycling, monitoring energy use, checking wildlife habitats similar activities?
- ◆ Is the Council working hard with local businesses and community groups to promote the Greening of the area?



This mural at The Environment Centre in High Wycombe includes a checklist of animals that can be found

Landscaping

- ◆ Does the Local Plan/LDF include policies to ensure that landscaping schemes are resilient to climate change?
- ◆ Is the Council ensuring that its own parks and gardens etc are resilient to climate change and minimise the need for irrigation?
- ◆ Does the Council have a policy aimed at increasing tree planting in urban areas to reduce summer heat and improve air quality?



Trees will play an important role in reducing summer temperatures in urban areas as climate change takes hold

Key information

Some general information about the effects of climate change on plants and gardening is available from the National Trust. See www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-gardening_global_greenhouse_summary.pdf

Biodiversity

- ◆ Has the Council agreed a Biodiversity Action Plan? Is it being monitored?
- ◆ Does the Local Plan/LDF give high priority to the conservation of important habitats and the creation of new habitats where existing ones are threatened by sea level rise or other changes?
- ◆ Does the Local Plan/LDF include policies to ensure that wildlife corridors are preserved or created in new developments?
- ◆ Is the high biodiversity of some brownfield sites recognised by the Council and are there plans to protect these?

Key information & Benchmark performance

The Town & Country Planning Association has published a guide to *Biodiversity by Design* that includes some exemplars. See www.tcpa.org.uk



Initiatives

- ◆ Has the Council led the way with any Green initiatives? Have any such claims been independently validated?
- ◆ How open is the Council to suggestions for such initiatives?

Benchmark performance

Broadland District Council initiated a scheme in 2004 to persuade householders in one community to get together to install solar water heating. Some 50 systems were installed as a result. The information promoting the scheme can be found at www.cred-uk.org/pdf/Broadsol%20information%20pack%20sep%202003.pdf

For information about the Green Liberal Democrats, please see our website www.greenlibdems.org.uk.

Or email challenge@wncb.net or phone 01485 540289