

The power of Local Authorities to tackle food and farming emissions: MP Briefing

Summary

Local councils have significant power to help achieve Net Zero. However, our new analysis has found that **food and farming is missing from nearly two thirds of council climate and biodiversity strategies** despite making up a third of UK GHG emissions.

Where national targets are in place in Wales and Scotland, councils are doing more including increasing food growing and agroecological farming, driving down food waste and opening up school food contracts to higher standard British farmers. 21 councils are demonstrating exemplary policies.

More leadership is needed from national government to unlock the potential of councils across the UK.

During COP27, nations were urged to reduce emissions from food systems by 30% by 2030. The UK Committee on Climate Change recommends reducing food system emissions by about 35%.

Recommendations

Clear national targets and obligations

The sixth IPCC report in 2021 lamented a lack of action internationally on farming and land use, and the latest Committee on Climate Change report concluded that UK government policy is 'not credible' on reducing food and farming emissions in line with the Paris Agreement. We recommend:

- As part of the UK Net Zero strategy review, **targets and a clear plan to reduce overall emissions from food, farming and land use** must be introduced. The Committee on Climate Change recommends a 'balanced net zero' reduction pathway of 35%. Reductions can come from reducing industrialised livestock and poultry farming and transitioning to agroecology.
- Introduce **legally-binding buying standards** for public sector food, to ensure public spend supports higher standard British farming and climate-friendly diets. Ensure compliance is monitored and reported transparently.
- **The UK Land Use Strategy** (due in 2023) must set out plans to bring farming in line with net zero and transition to agroecology.

Recognise the opportunity for councils

- **Support a sustainable food partnership in every council** - as recommended in the National Food Strategy - to deliver solutions to climate change and food that are rooted in their locale. Councils with Sustainable Food Partnerships scored 11 per cent higher on average in our research.

- **Local authorities must have more power**, especially to support agroecology and prevent industrialised agriculture. Large-scale industrialised 'factory-farming' is on the rise in the UK, and factory farms are polluting our air and water and posing a risk of antimicrobial resistance and disease.
- **Councils must be given more funding as part of climate prevention**, to support a transition to good diets and farming.

Overview of results

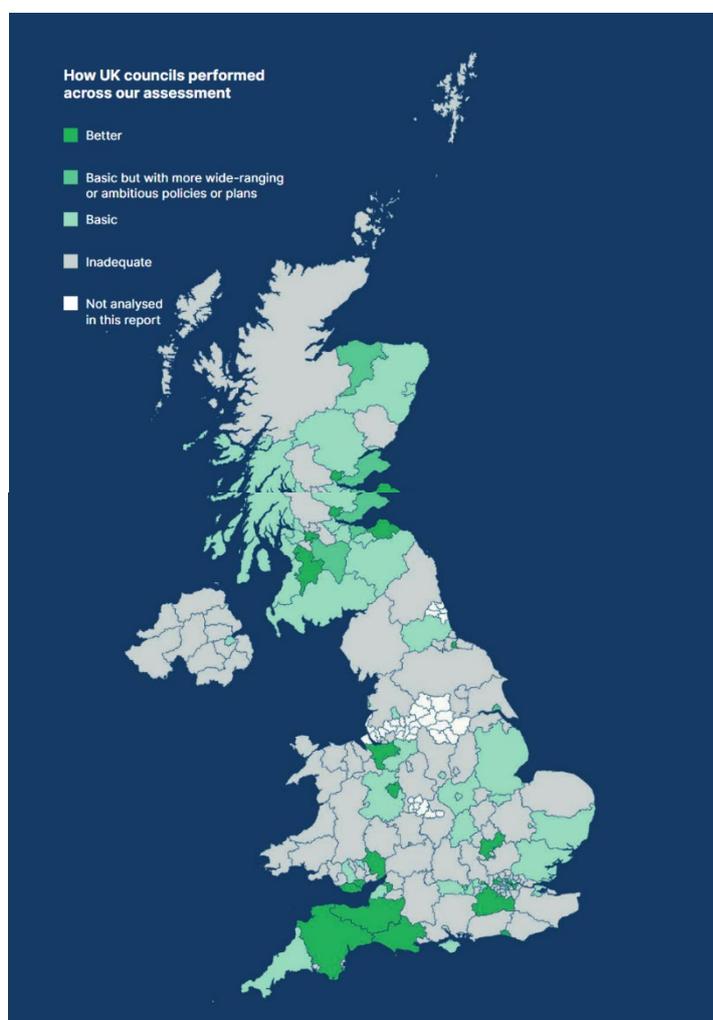
Sustain analysed 197 UK council's climate, biodiversity and food strategies in August 2022. An interactive map of results is [here](#).

Finding 1: UK councils have significant power to tackle our broken food system

With an annual procurement spend of over £69 billion, and as owners of 1.3 million acres of land in England alone, UK councils have opportunities to create a healthier and more climate-friendly food system.

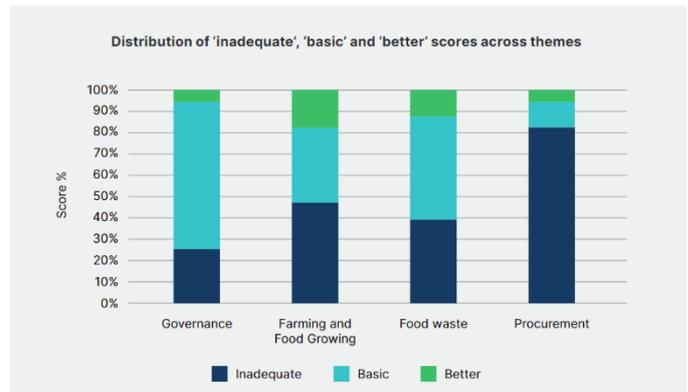
21 councils (about 12%) were found to have more developed and measurable plans on food and climate change. They are Brighton and Hove, Bristol, Cardiff, Central Bedfordshire, Cheshire West and Chester, Clackmannanshire, Devon, Dorset, Ealing, East Ayrshire, East Lothian, Glasgow, Greenwich, Middlesbrough, Monmouthshire, Somerset, Surrey, Telford and Wrekin, Tower Hamlets and the Vale of Glamorgan. Their actions include:

- **Procurement of good food:** For schools, meals in the community ('Meals on Wheels'); social services catering; staff catering and events. This purchasing includes 3 million meals daily in more than 23,000 state schools, with an annual turnover of over £360 million.
- **Localised purchasing to support regional food economies**, and switching to more vegetables, pulses and grains and better meat on menus
- **Encouraging more climate-friendly diets** through public communication
- **Increasing allotment and community food growing**
- **Transitioning council-owned farms** to agroecological practices
- **Supporting sustainable food** rather than factory farming in planning policy
- **Reducing food waste**



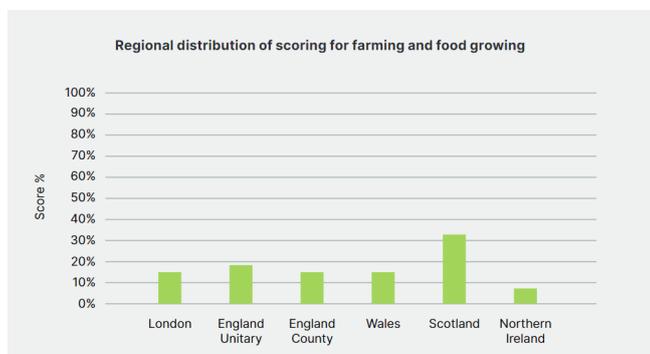
Finding 2: The majority of councils are not using this power, and this is a risk to meeting Paris Agreement targets

For six in ten councils (59 per cent) no significant or meaningful actions were found to address the climate impact of food, and a further 31 per cent had only 'basic' plans. Action was found to be particularly lacking on procurement, demonstrating a need for national standards for all public food.



This is reflective of wider policy. In the UK, the food sector is decarbonising at half the pace of the wider economy and farming emissions have not reduced in a decade.

Finding 3: Strong national policy makes a significant difference



National targets and statutory obligations on food growing and waste in Scotland and Wales translated to significantly more action at a local level.

[Download the full report](#) or [explore the interactive map](#) to find out how your local council is performing

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Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional, and local level.

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