

# Transforming energy: THE POWER OF LOCAL

## TOOLKIT



A practical toolkit to help community groups and local authorities work together to harness the power of local energy.



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## Bristol Energy Network

Bristol Energy Network is a Community Interest Company (Company number: 09077917), an umbrella organisation for community groups with an interest in energy in Bristol and the surrounding area. Set up in 2010, the Network supports communities to engage with the energy system.

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# About this toolkit



Bristol Energy Network community solar workshop

**Bristol Energy Network (BEN) has developed this toolkit for community groups and local authorities to help them understand each other better and to provide ideas for how best to work together.**

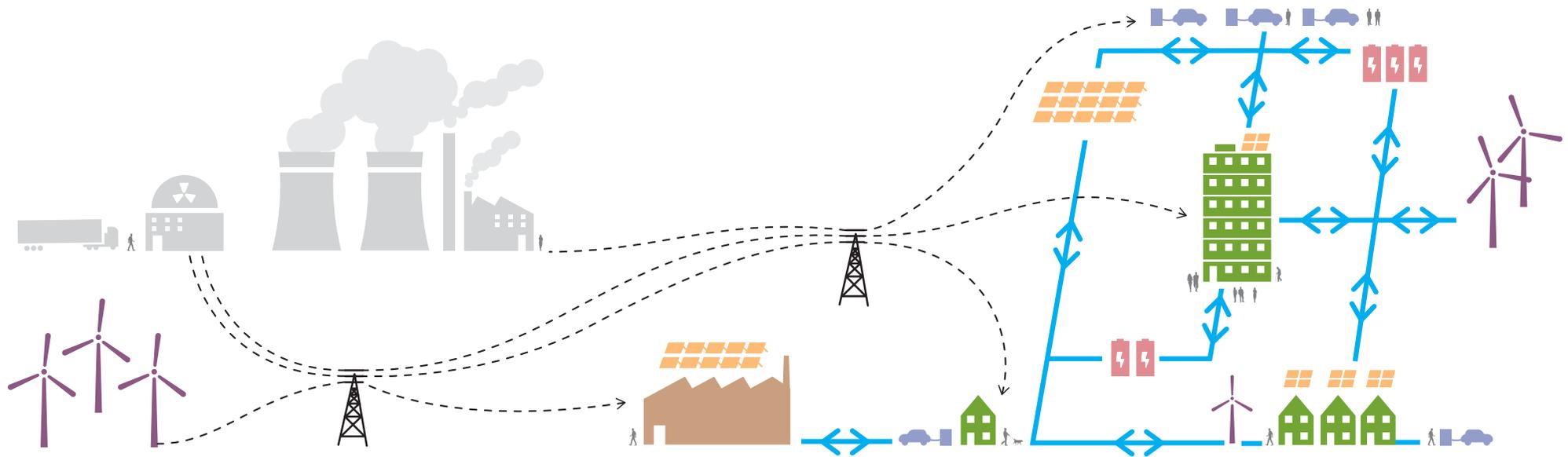
The toolkit draws on our experience in Bristol of developing community energy by and for communities, and on our knowledge of council-led approaches to sustainable energy. The focus of the toolkit is on how community and municipal energy can support each other to **tackle the climate emergency and create sustainable, inclusive and socially just energy systems with citizens at their centre.**

The aim of this toolkit is to help support community groups and local authorities develop their shared journeys to local energy. With limited resources, collaboration is key; identifying how community groups and the local authority can help shape and deliver objectives together makes us all stronger and more effective.

Focusing on the development of local energy in Bristol, the value of a network such as BEN is clear: acting as a strong voice representing the diversity of local communities and making connections between the grassroots and policy. In this role as a trusted intermediary, BEN supports existing and new initiatives and brings community energy into wider projects run by Bristol City Council (BCC) and others. In turn, BCC is committed to facilitating community energy, engaging with groups and finding ways to incorporate community approaches in their own projects. Other local authorities take a different approach appropriate to their local needs and these are also discussed and illustrated by case studies.

\*The themes summarised in this toolkit are explored in-depth in its companion publication: **Transforming energy: the power of 'local', a report of good practice in partnership working** ([www.bristolenergynetwork.org/categories/toolkit](http://www.bristolenergynetwork.org/categories/toolkit)). The longer report also contains more detailed case studies and a narrative history of Bristol's evolution in community energy.

# What is local energy?



above: Decentralised energy system.

Traditionally, energy flowed from large power stations through networks to consumers. This model is changing as renewable technologies have become readily available, new and agile companies generate and supply energy, and the government has encouraged small-scale energy generation. Consumers can now be producers, and many different approaches to supplying energy and energy services are emerging.

Growing awareness of the threats posed by climate change and of the many inequalities in society are prompting people to take action at a local level. Increasingly, they recognise that community and other local approaches to energy are part of the solution to these pressing issues.

Local energy can be local authority managed municipal energy services or grassroots community-owned renewable generation, industry and university supported research and innovation projects or community-led energy advice and switching campaigns. They may come from different starting points and take different approaches, but they are all rooted in communities and tackle similar problems, for example reducing poverty, retrofitting draughty and damp homes, improving resource efficiency, bringing communities together and providing jobs.

## Why do local authorities get involved with local energy?

- to harness local economic benefits of increased investment, income generation, business rates receipts and the creation of local jobs
- to invest in urban regeneration and renewal, which makes homes fit for the long-term future
- to help turn places into communities where people share common values and work together for the common good
- to enhance people's health and wellbeing by making their homes warm and dry and reducing their energy bills
- to help them develop trusted relationships in local communities so they can deliver other services
- as a way of meeting local, regional, national and international policy commitments

# Why take local or community action on energy?

When people collaborate on local energy issues, they redress the power imbalance in our energy system and take control of assets that are owned by, and for the benefit of, the community.

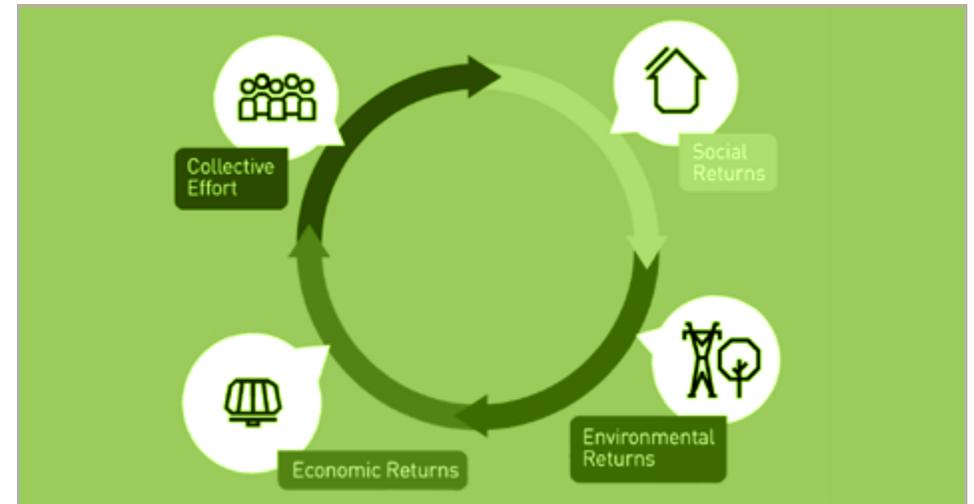
**Community energy** is found across the energy system, from production and transportation to energy use, now and into the future. It can emerge from the grassroots, or be fostered by local government, businesses or energy companies. It is often reliant on volunteers, but over time can develop into community businesses.

## Community energy delivers other benefits too:

- **Environment** – tackles climate change, reduces carbon emissions.
- **Society** – helps people out of poverty, improving their health and wellbeing. Builds resilient and engaged communities.
- **Economy** – saves on bills, provides investment opportunities, creates local jobs and keeps money in the local economy. Profits from locally generated energy can be used to set up a community benefit fund.

**Local authorities** are key to reducing carbon emissions and achieving the UK's climate change commitments. Many have declared a climate emergency and pledged increased action. They are trying to reduce carbon emissions from their estates and exploring ways to support local energy systems.

**People** are at the heart of this local energy revolution. When citizens engage and work together to address pressing energy issues, they can achieve more impact and value. By pooling knowledge and resources and collaborating with local government, businesses and universities they can help democratise the energy system and address the inequalities within it.



Energy Communities: Decarb Europe

## Types of community energy group

1. Area or neighbourhood-based community energy groups are typically set up by local residents to tackle a range of energy issues in their local area. These groups benefit from in-depth knowledge of their community and its infrastructure.
2. Issue-based community energy groups are typically set up to cover a larger geographic area (e.g. a city or region) and focus on a specific issue within the energy system. For instance, renewable energy cooperatives are set up so people can invest in, produce and sometimes even use renewably generated electricity.
3. Existing groups or associations with an interest in energy. These groups are already established and are bound together by a common cause, faith or interest. They may be youth clubs, day centres or church groups, who build an interest in energy and begin developing energy projects. These groups benefit from having an established presence and social network.

In practice, these types of community group overlap. Groups also evolve as they develop or as members and needs change. The availability of external financial and knowledge-based support also influences how a group's activities evolve.

# For community groups

**This section of the guide is for community groups working on local energy issues who want to engage with local authorities.**

Whatever the focus of your energy group, or the stage it's at, we hope the following suggestions, based on our own experience, will help you identify the 'sweet spot' between community and municipal approaches to local energy, and maximise potential benefits.

NB: This toolkit doesn't set out the process of setting up community groups, which has been extensively covered elsewhere, including on the Community Energy Hub: <https://hub.communityenergyengland.org>

## 1. Make the case in your community

A first step in establishing a community energy initiative is to identify the problems or issues that need addressing and work out why your group is well placed to tackle them. Understanding what's needed and being clear about how to help will galvanise your group and attract more people to get involved.

## 2. Learn from elsewhere

Having identified the energy issue, and your approach to tackling it, find out how other community energy groups have approached it. There are plenty of resources that can give you inspiration and ideas. Community Energy England is a great place to start, or see what else is happening locally already.

## 3. Build an asset map

Who and what is already in your community and could help make your project happen? These 'assets' might be people active in the community, rooms where you can meet volunteers or project participants, physical assets like buildings and roofs to set up advice centres or install renewable generation, and local knowledge and strengths, including existing community groups that might welcome energy know-how or project ideas.

A process called Asset Based Community Development can help you map and use assets. <https://www.nurtureddevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/>.



## 4. Identify mutual benefits

Your asset map helps make the case to potential local authority partners for what your group can bring to a project. Understanding the local authority's policy priorities can help you identify and explain mutual benefits.

Look further than energy policy to environmental, social and economic priorities. Your project might address fuel poverty or create employment; yield savings on energy bills or build community cohesion.

## 5. Talk to people

Use your asset map to identify key people and organisations to talk to about your project and develop an engagement strategy. Reach out to them at face to face meetings, with newsletters, at community and networking events, on social media and through local authority initiatives.

# For community groups

## People to reach out to

- **Community anchor groups** active in your area. They might not have an energy focus but could link you up with people who do.
- **Community development workers** are trusted intermediaries who may be linked to community anchors, the local authority or organisations in the wider area.
- **Local authority** – there are many departments with an interest in energy issues, but they might not communicate with each other.
- **Local politicians** – councillors, Cabinet Members, the Mayor and MP like good news stories. Arrange briefings for local politicians, get involved in shaping your Local Plan, respond to consultations and don't be partisan or party political.
- **Researchers and experts** in local universities or businesses could have access to funds, knowledge and skills.
- **Networking opportunities** are useful in linking your group up with others who have common aims.

## 6. Tackle bureaucracy

As your group grows, you will need to take on a **formal legal structure**, which makes it easier for local authorities and other partners to work with you. There are several different legal structures you could consider (if you haven't already), including a **community interest company, charity, community benefit society or cooperative**. For more information on governance and structure, see <https://hub.communityenergyengland.org>

## 7. Find funding and resources

Funding and support can be financial or 'in kind.' Local authorities can be primary supporters and funders. They can also unlock other sources of funding and support via formal partnerships or letters of support for other grant applications. If your project addresses multiple issues and helps deliver on the wider policy objectives of other local authority departments, you can look to them for funding and support and it might open up energy issues to new communities.

If you find that your project conflicts with local authority policies, you might need to collaborate and compromise with the LA, discuss whether the policies can be adapted or changed or reframe the project's aims and objectives.

## 8. Monitor and evaluate your project

It can be hard to find time to monitor and evaluate a project when you're struggling to deliver it on a shoestring. But evaluating the effectiveness of a project (particularly in addressing policy issues) is key to proving the value of your work, and in justifying future partnerships and funding.

Help can be found with evaluating a project from the local authority or from researchers, students, interns and local people who are interested in what you do and have the time and knowledge to capture the project's impacts.

Some good ways of measuring success include surveys of project outcomes and events where learning can be shared.

## How community energy can support local authority policies

- Reduces the town/city's carbon emissions with little or no council investment.
- Generates revenue to support the operations of community groups.
- Can bring in new sources of funding e.g. through community shares or crowdfunds.
- Communities feel empowered and supported to act.
- People become more aware of the energy they use.
- Increases local energy security.
- Retains and develops local skills through training and knowledge sharing.
- Can create local jobs.
- Provides on-the-ground advice to people in fuel poverty.
- As a trusted local group, you can build relationships with those that others may struggle to reach.

# CASE STUDY

## Bath and West Community Energy (BWCE) – A single city entity, community initiative.

<https://www.bwce.coop>

‘Our vision is for a local area able to supply decreasing local energy demand with increasing generation from renewable energy, driven by collective action and community ownership.’

BWCE was established in 2010 by local people seeking to raise money to install community-owned solar arrays on the roofs of local buildings.

Since then, BWCE has played a pioneering role in the development of community-owned renewable energy, not only developing their own projects, but by supporting other community energy groups including Low Carbon Gordano and Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy. To date, they have raised nearly £16 million through 11 community share and bond offers and installed over 20MW of solar PV projects comprising 12.35MW of BWCE’s own projects (panels on 11 schools and three community buildings and four ground-mounted arrays) and 8MW of projects owned by community energy partners. They work closely with Bath and North East Somerset Council and have a cooperation agreement.

Their projects have been funded by a mix of bank debt and community fundraises, with over £9 million raised by members and bondholders. Members become shareholders in BWCE. The principle of one member one vote, regardless of shareholding, forms the foundation of a democratic approach to organisational governance. All surplus cash is recycled back into local communities via an independent community fund. The fund has so far distributed £145,000 to local community projects acting on carbon reduction and fuel poverty.



Bath and West Community Energy

# CASE STUDY

## The C.H.E.E.S.E. project: citizen-led initiative to make homes warmer

<https://www.cheeseproject.co.uk/>

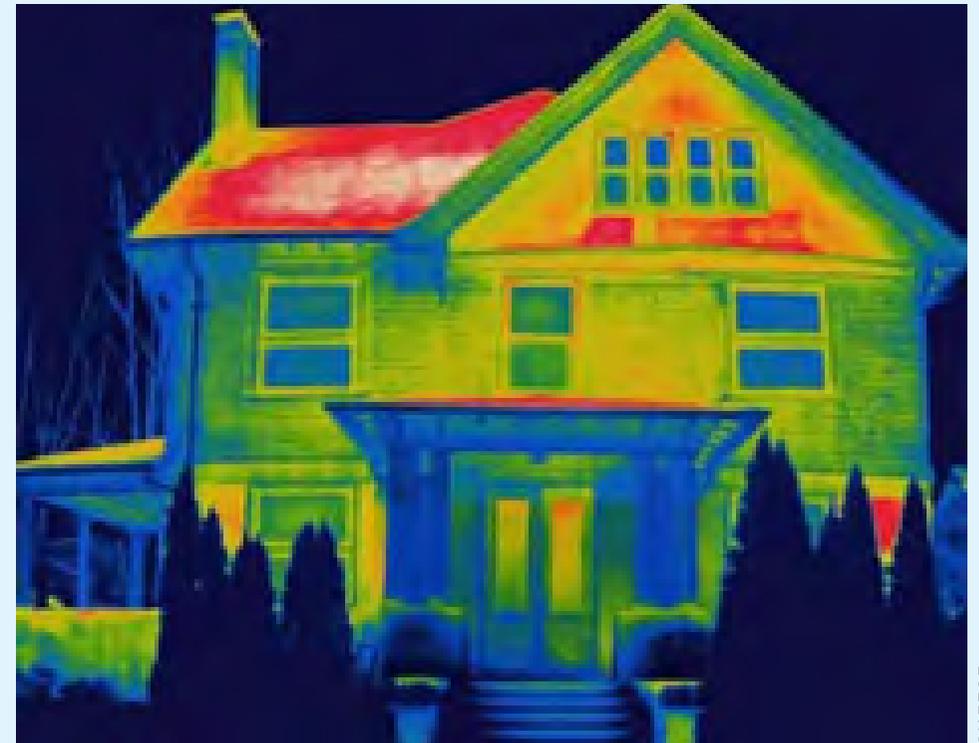
Cold Homes Energy Efficiency Survey Experts (C.H.E.E.S.E.) is a Bristol based not-for-profit CIC that aims to reduce domestic energy losses at low cost.

Using cheap smartphone-based thermal imaging technology, surveyors (together with the householder) find 'cold spots' in buildings where heat is escaping and there may be issues with damp. Problems are identified and solutions (often low cost and DIY) are found. Low income households have free surveys and those who can afford to, pay a small amount. Financing mainly comes from grant funding.

The C.H.E.E.S.E. Project (TCP) was conceived by citizens, for citizens, trains people to become surveyors and provides low-cost ways for people to make their homes warmer. It supports Bristol Green Capital's intended legacy to build on the thriving environmental sector and expand and develop initiatives and partnerships. It also supports BCC's commitment to reducing fuel poverty, addressing inequalities and improving people's health and wellbeing.

To date, TCP has engaged seven community groups, surveyed over 330 Bristol homes (1/3 free to low-income homes), and 84% of paying customers carried out remedial action within a year. Thirty-two local surveyors have been trained. The project won Bristol Green Capital Volunteers for Energy award, and Community Energy England/Wales award for Community Energy and Carbon Saving (2018).

TCP licenses its system (at low cost and to protect IP and maintain high standards) to other city partners, with two currently operating in London. Under the license, TCP provides the unique kit, software, methodology and proven training for surveyors along with easy-to-understand remedial action.



Thermal image of a typical home

CHEESE

# The 'Bristol Community Strategy for Energy'



Above: Core themes of the Bristol strategy and the basis for action on energy.

## Putting communities at the heart of Bristol's energy system

A vision of:

**'A city where everyone has access to sufficient affordable low-carbon energy for their needs; where wise and innovative use of energy empowers the citizens and drives the economy, with active communities across the city generating and managing a significant amount of their energy need.'**

The Bristol Community Strategy for Energy (BCSfE) was first developed in 2013 through the Bristol Energy Network by local community groups and the organisations that they work with.

The BCSfE approach identified a common framework and five key areas where communities can engage with energy and where energy can help communities. These core themes are at the centre of the 'wheel' diagram and are applicable to most communities who are thinking about their role in the local energy system. Alongside the more recent addition of 'smart' approaches to energy, they form a valuable framework within which to develop new approaches and projects.

The Bristol Community Strategy for Energy can be found at <http://bristolenergynetwork.org/aboutus/>.

# CASE STUDY

## A local authority approach to energy

### Bristol City Council working with communities

Bristol City Council has positioned itself as a facilitator when it comes to community energy. It does its best to support projects through to fruition; whether through investment in a community energy opportunity, by helping groups navigate the council's decision pathways or getting community voices heard. The BCC Energy Service has a clear desire to work with community energy groups in its projects and tries to put the involvement of community energy groups at the core of project design.

The building of relationships with community energy organisations across the city has been key to progressing combined efforts. Bristol Energy Network has critically provided the council with a mechanism to develop projects that have a grassroots/bottom up emphasis. This isn't always possible in its entirety (often due to tight timescales imposed by grant streams) but it is committed to as much as possible. Relationships such as these also allow for ideas to be shared and developed together which often end up with much richer outcomes. We know that not every area has a mature community energy scene, but many will have some kind of community presence where energy can be a catalyst for action.

The Lawrence Weston Solar Farm described here is a model which can be replicated with other community energy generation projects in the future. BCC also hosts around another 1MW of community owned solar installations on rooftops.

## Working together on renewable energy

The Lawrence Weston Solar Farm was developed and is owned by Bristol Energy Cooperative (BEC) working with the local community through Ambition Lawrence Weston.



The solar farm is a great example of how Bristol City Council was able to help facilitate a community project. Located on BCC land leased to BEC to host the solar farm, BCC also provided a bridging loan to the project which has subsequently been successfully paid back. The local community in Lawrence Weston benefit through a share of the profits from the energy generated. Annual output is around 4300MWh, enough to power 1000 homes.

Ambition Lawrence Weston was set up in response to a decline in local services and has now, through intensive local consultation, produced two iterations of [community plans](#) the latest of which contains a whole chapter on community energy.

[Bristol Energy Co-operative](#) has been growing locally owned renewable energy in Bristol since 2011 and now has around 9100 MWh of solar across Bristol and Somerset.

# For local authorities

## This section of the guide is for local authorities working on energy issues who want to better engage with communities.

**Local authorities** across the UK are developing models for local energy based on local needs. However, a report commissioned by UKERC (2017) highlighted that political and economic uncertainty in the UK is hindering local authority action on energy. This has led to “opportunistic, small projects, rather than strategic investment and long-term capacity building.”

Whether short- or long-term, there are many actions and activities local authorities can take to help create thriving local energy systems in their communities.

### 1. Make the case

How might community approaches to local energy help you meet your local, regional, national and international policies and targets?

When a community group suggests a local energy project, or you are tasked with devising a municipal energy strategy, identify links to your LA's strategic priorities. Make your case for local energy to senior decision makers by referring back to local and national policy priorities. Look first at environmental and energy policies and targets and then widen out to other issues such as health, community cohesion, housing and economic policy. Local energy can positively impact all these areas.

When asked to develop policy, consider both how community energy could be affected by that policy, and whether it could help deliver it.

### 2. Learn from elsewhere

Talk to other local authorities already engaged with local energy. They have more than likely had to jump through the same hoops as you and developed solutions that may be transferable. They may also have template documents they can share. Community Energy England, CSE and UK100 may help identify useful connections.

## Why local authorities get involved with local energy

- Economic benefits include more jobs and investment, income generation and increased business rate revenue
- Communities are regenerated and renewed by making homes fit for the future
- Where people share common values and work together for the common good, communities are stronger
- Warm and dry homes that are cheap to heat make people healthier and happier
- Developing trust in local communities helps LAs deliver other services
- Local, regional, national and international policy commitments can be met through community energy

### 3. Build a stakeholder map

Map the existing community and energy groups operating in your area. This will help you to understand the skills available, and the projects already happening. Other departments (and the communications team) will have lists of community groups they work with, so reach out to housing, health and social care, sustainability and planning.

Social media is a great place to find out about local groups, their key people and priorities. Community Energy England will know groups in your area, and their database is searchable online at <https://communityenergyengland.org/current-members>

### 4. Identify mutual benefits

Now you have a better idea of the local energy landscape, you can consider which projects or ideas would benefit both the local authority and the community. One idea could be to investigate the local authority property database to see if it owns buildings or land where community owned renewable generation could be located.

## 5. Engage and consult the community

Bring community voices to your project early in its development: co-production will result in a more rounded and representative project. Local knowledge is valuable and makes people feel useful. Listen to the community's needs and build on their priorities. Build trust, value people and be open and honest – don't promise more than is possible.

## 6. Tackle bureaucracy

Throughout the life of a project, but especially at the start, you are likely to come up against red tape. There are ways that you can alleviate the burden.

Brief as many officers as possible on community energy and its benefits. Essential allies for shared projects include colleagues in the Finance, Planning and Property teams. Other departments might also be relevant to your new project – who will need to give approval or sign-off? Keep them informed from the start. You could make bureaucracy work for you, by setting targets for local community participation in the energy system.

Senior officers and local politicians are interested in community energy projects and love good news stories. Get their buy-in and support.

The UK Energy Research Centre (2017) identified the following barriers to local authority action on local energy. When you set up and work through your project, it may be useful to bear them in mind and work out how you might get over them:

- Limitations to statutory local powers over energy services
- Financial constraints and austerity in public finances
- Fragmentation across local authority departments
- Uncertainties in clean energy policies and subsidies
- A focus on financial performance over wider benefits such as climate protection or social welfare

## Models for local authority energy engagement

- **Develop energy plans, policies and strategies**
- **Improve the energy efficiency of LA-owned own buildings**
- **Develop and own or collaborate on local generation assets to create revenue by:**
  - ~ Investing in generation projects or opening up LA land or buildings for others to do so.
  - ~ Investing in heat networks.
  - ~ Working with social or non-profit enterprises.
  - ~ Entering into long-term concession contracts (e.g. with private sector energy suppliers) or set up joint public-private ventures.

## 7. Find or offer funding and resources

A local authority can unlock funding and resources for community led energy projects that the community groups can't access. Find funding streams that fit your local energy ambitions and apply as a local authority or support your community partners. A simple letter of support could make all the difference to a successful community grant application. You could set up or access existing small pots of LA money to help groups get engaged in energy and develop groups and ideas. Or you could offer 'soft' support e.g. staff, expertise and back office.

## 8. Monitor and evaluate projects

Measuring success unlocks further funding, and the more evidence the better. Other local authorities and established community groups can share their monitoring and evaluation methodologies and reports.

Community groups may not have the time or people to effectively monitor or evaluate a project. Offer to help them by providing resources yourself or linking them up with other organisations (e.g. local universities or businesses).

Some good ways of measuring success might include:

- Public attitude surveys
- Action pledges
- Bench-marking activities

# CASE STUDY

## REPLICATE: local authority funded projects engage residents and share learning

<https://www.connectingbristol.org/projects/replicate/>

BCC secured EU funding for REPLICATE, a research and development project to deploy integrated energy, mobility and ICT solutions and understand their impact on hard-pressed households in three of Bristol's most deprived wards.

It involved replacing old domestic appliances with new energy-efficient smart appliances like washing machines, and retrofitting homes with efficient boilers, insulation and solar panels. BEN's role was to work with community groups to engage a wide audience reflecting the broad demographic of the target wards. With community partners, BEN attended a range of local events and trained energy champions to engage and recruit householders.

The project supports a key government priority of enabling a smarter, more efficient energy system, for which around £265m will be invested in smart systems research, development, and demonstration across government, Innovate UK and Research Councils. In Bristol, the project aligns with the ambitions of BCC's 2015 climate change framework and community goals (in BCSfE) of energy literacy and neighbourhood communications on energy.

Overall, 150 homes had smart appliances installed, around 160 homes had retrofit measures and another 1000 residents were engaged. Community Energy Champions are now embedded in local communities and working on a new project. More communities are energy aware and households are benefiting from reduced energy bills.

Ways that the project engaged with hard-to-reach communities can be used in other situations. It found that working with local community organisations is key, and that establishing Energy Champions effectively delivers project messages, raises awareness and gains buy-in.



Replicate

# CASE STUDY

## Bristol Community Energy Fund

<https://www.bristolcommunityenergy.co.uk/>

Local Authority-led grants support grassroots actions in hard-to-reach communities.

Bristol Community Energy Fund (BCEF) was set up by Bristol City Council and funded by central government.

The fund allowed small Bristol based charitable organisations to apply for core, capital or project funding to support local people to use less energy, use renewable energy or cut their energy bills. BCC worked in close collaboration with BEN to ensure the fund was inclusive and represented the city's population whilst helping to broaden the energy movement. Projects led by communities most affected by energy issues and groups underrepresented in the energy movement, e.g. older or disabled people, BME and migrant communities, were prioritised.

The fund furthered BCC's goals (e.g. reducing GHG emissions and energy use and increasing uptake of low carbon and renewable energy). It addressed social and health issues (e.g. fuel poverty) and improved city resilience.

BCC secured and underwrote the fund, gave officer time for administration and lent political buy-in. BEN promoted the fund to hard-to-reach communities and supported the application process.

Six rounds of funding gave £300,000 of grants to 45 community energy projects, including to Dhek Bhal (tackling isolation for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people) for energy surgeries and surveys, and the Bristol Playbus for solar power and engagement.

BCEF could be replicated elsewhere – with a fund financed via community groups already delivering community benefit from renewables surpluses, asking local business to contribute to a community pot or using available LA money.



## Practical things Local Authorities can do to support community energy

- Make sites (roofs, land) available for community owned renewable installations (PV, Wind).
- Source funding for operating and running costs.
- Provide catalyst funding to support the development of grassroots experimentation (BCC in 2010/11, Devon County Council 2017/18).
- Provide soft support where possible, including the use of staff, expertise and back office support.
- Champion community action, in public and in local government legislation.
- Set targets for local community participation in the energy system.
- Work with trusted community partners.
- Listen to community concerns and aspirations.
- Connect and communicate across officers, departments and members so that everyone knows what's happening.

# Bristol's story



Creative Commons: Velodenz 2011

**Bristol is the largest city in the South West of England, home to approximately 450,000 people. Known for its green credentials, in 2015 it was the first UK city to hold the title of European Green Capital. The Bristol Green Capital Partnership, originally set up to pursue this accolade, now has around 900 members from across many sectors.**

The Soil Association, Sustrans, Triodos Bank UK, the Environment Agency and the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) are headquartered in the city. It has its own local currency, two universities, hosts one of the UK's largest community renewable cooperatives and has its own municipal energy company. But it is in the grassroots that Bristol finds its strength and it is there that community approaches to energy have germinated and grown.

In the following, we note some of the recent milestones on Bristol's journey in local energy. For a fuller account, please see the sister report to this toolkit **Transforming energy: the power of 'local,' a report of good practice in partnership working.**

## Community and energy

Contemporary community energy groups emerged in the late 2000s motivated by 'peak oil,' the 2008 Climate Change Act and the abject failure of international Climate negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009. Neighbourhood community energy groups were set up to develop solutions to local energy issues and city-wide groups explored community-owned and managed renewable energy installations and the demonstration of green retrofits. Support was available from CSE and the Council's sustainable energy team, and small grants of up to £10k provided vital funding. These groups came together in 2010 to form the Bristol Energy Network (BEN) to share skills and resources and advance local engagement with sustainable energy. BEN's open meetings continue to bring the city's community energy movement together.

Over the years since, a number of small funding schemes, both local and national, have helped to grow the movement, from the local revolving catalyst fund in 2011, national Local Energy Assessment Fund in 2012 (where Bristol groups were particularly successful in securing funds due in part to the help and support offered by CSE and BEN), support from Green Capital funds in 2015 and the Bristol Community Energy Fund (2016).



Bristol mayor Marvin Rees & BEN project development officer David Tudgey

In spring 2013, Bristol's communities developed the Bristol Community Strategy for Energy in the City. Led by BEN with support from the Council, CSE and the University of Bristol, the strategy developed collaboratively over a number of meetings and with multiple authors and set out a common framework within which different approaches could be taken (see page 10).

In 2014 BEN formalised as a Community Interest Company. It currently has a voluntary Board of nine to oversee activity and part-time staffing of three.

Good working relationships with the city council have been beneficial to all. BCC established its Energy Service Team in 2011 and, alongside the Sustainability and Innovation team, has worked with the city's communities in developing and supporting local energy responses.

The Energy Service was set up particularly to look at the council's own activity, and in 2015 established Bristol Energy – a wholly-owned energy supply company which is now taking a lead on energy service innovation in the city.

In parallel, the Energy Service has led in offering roofs for community owned renewables (from 2015) and set up models for retrofit, linked initially to the short-lived Green Deal approach promoted by the government. This 'Warm Up Bristol' project was a significant milestone in municipal and community collaboration on energy, building on the strength of each and facilitating learning between approaches. The project had some setbacks but also paved the way for further collaboration.

Funds secured by BCC during 2015 and subsequently to address energy issues now typically include elements of community energy and projects seek early inputs to their development. With the help of BEN and its members, energy now reaches deeper into communities including those not typically part of environmental movements. This is facilitated by the trust built up at a community level.

### City level policy – the case of Bristol

#### **Local authorities must follow national policy but can also go further.**

Bristol City Council is ambitious in its aims to go above and beyond national policy. In November 2018, it declared a Climate Emergency – the first local authority to do so, and in July 2019, Bristol pledged to be carbon neutral by 2030. Both motions passed with cross-party support.

There is a long list of local strategies that have been important in demonstrating the city's energy and environmental ambition, most recently:

- Since declaring its climate emergency in 2018, Bristol City Council has produced the ['Mayor's Climate Emergency Action Plan 2019'](#)
- **One City Plan** Launched in January 2019, the One City Plan is a long-term document looking ahead to Bristol by 2050. It sets out how city partners will work together to create a 'fair, healthy and sustainable city.'
- **City Leap Prospectus** (from 2018) Bristol City Council seeks long-term partners to work with them to achieve shared energy goals and build a resilient, equitable city.
- **Our Resilient Future: A Framework for Climate and Energy Security 2015.**

# More information and support



## GENERAL RESOURCES

**Ashden Climate Action Co-Benefits Toolkit** supporting local authority action by demonstrating co-benefits such as health, equity and economic: <https://www.ashden.org/programmes/co-benefits>

**Bristol Energy Network** website resources including notes from training sessions, research reports and papers, notes of meetings and case studies: <http://bristolenergynetwork.org/resource/>

**Community Energy England** website, publications including their annual 'State of the sector' report: <https://communityenergyengland.org/pages/cee-publications>

**The Community Energy Hub** <https://hub.communityenergyengland.org> is full of guides and other resources

**Centre for Sustainable Energy** resources: <https://www.cse.org.uk/resources>

**Pure Leapfrog's** 2014 guide **Introductory Guide: Community Energy for Local Authorities** still contains useful advice even though some situations have changed over the last five years. In particular, page 10 on basic questions to get you started: <https://www.pureleapfrog.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=458d8b2e-1456-4fe4-8484-293ae9374bef>

**Power to Change's** 2019 **A guide to local government for community businesses** is a good overview to how local government works and potential points of engagement: [https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/A-Guide\\_To\\_Local\\_Government\\_FINAL\\_DIGITAL.pdf](https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/A-Guide_To_Local_Government_FINAL_DIGITAL.pdf)

## SPECIFIC APPROACHES AND PROJECTS

**Bath and West Community Energy (BWCE)** a single city entity, community initiative working with the local authority via a co-operation agreement <https://www.bwce.coop>

**Brighton and Hove Energy Services Cooperative (BHESCo)** award-winning community energy <https://bhesco.co.uk>

**The Bristol Approach to Citizen Sensing** <http://www.bristolapproach.org>

**Community Energy South (CES)** regional umbrella organisation with funding from the county councils: <https://www.communityenergysouth.org/>  
<https://www.devoncommunityenergy.org.uk>

**CSE** local energy assessment matrix: <https://www.cse.org.uk/downloads/toolkits/policy/community-energy/planning/local-sustainable-energy-assessment-matrix.pdf>

**Devon Community Energy Network** <https://www.devoncommunityenergy.org.uk/>

**Oxford Low Carbon Hub** <https://www.lowcarbonhub.org/>

**Plymouth Energy Community (PEC)** a cross-city initiative started by the local authority and with LA-employed staff: <http://www.plymouthenergycommunity.com>. For energy advice and tips: <http://www.plymouthenergycommunity.com/help/tips>

## BACKGROUND AND FURTHER READING

**Centre for Research into Energy Demand Solutions** <https://www.creds.ac.uk/>

**EnergyREV** research and innovation for Smart Local Energy Systems <https://www.energyrev.org.uk/>

**The EU Clean energy for all Europeans Package of legislation** <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/energy-strategy-and-energy-union/clean-energy-all-europeans>

**Transforming Energy the Power of 'Local'** a report of good practice in partnership working <http://bristolenergynetwork.org/category/toolkit/>

**UK100** the climate and clean energy network for UK local authorities <https://www.uk100.org/communicating-climate-change/>

**UKERC** 2017, What We Know about Local Authority Engagement in UK Energy Systems Ambitions, Activities, Business Structures & Ways Forward [file:///C:/Users/cb12373/Chrome%20Local%20Downloads/UKERC\\_ETI\\_Report\\_Local\\_Authority\\_engagement\\_in%20UK\\_energy\\_systems.pdf](file:///C:/Users/cb12373/Chrome%20Local%20Downloads/UKERC_ETI_Report_Local_Authority_engagement_in%20UK_energy_systems.pdf)

**WECA South West Energy Hub** <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/south-west-energy-hub/>

Identifying the 'sweet spot' that intersects community- and council-led approaches to local energy is crucial in creating sustainable, inclusive and socially just energy systems with citizens at their centre. With limited resources collaboration is key, and this toolkit helps community groups and local authorities understand each other better and identify mutually beneficial ways to of working. Over the years we have seen that recognising how we can help each other deliver on objectives has made us all stronger and done more to help our communities. As resources become ever more limited, these collaborative mechanisms will help us all to survive and thrive.

"Community energy can now be found in many towns and villages around the country. Local authorities are beginning to understand how it can help them meet some of their key strategic aims, from combating fuel poverty to reaching their carbon reduction targets. I recommend this toolkit as a great resource for community energy groups and local authorities to help them make the case for working more closely together to achieve their goals."

Emma Bridge  
Chief Executive, Community Energy England

"In 2018, Bristol City Council was the first UK council to declare a climate emergency, and our partnerships with community energy groups in the city play a key role in helping us meet our pledge for Bristol to be carbon neutral by 2030. Community energy also helps us deliver on other, equally important goals of economic and social justice. We hope that this toolkit will encourage other local authorities to recognise the unique role community energy can play in supporting them in these key policy areas."

Lorna Humphreys  
Energy Project Manager, Bristol City Council Energy Service

"Where local authorities collaborate, support and invest in community energy there is clear, significant and lasting positive change that not only benefits the community energy organisation and local authority, but also the local economy, society and environment'.

Community Energy England 'State of the Sector' addendum report on Local Authorities, 2017.

