

Exeter City Council Carbon Literacy Case Study

Exeter City Council is the local government body for the city of Exeter, Devon. The City Council provides services within the city including housing, refuse collections and recycling, planning, environmental health, tourism, leisure, and arts facilities. Since February 2022, 108 staff and Councillors (15%+ of the workforce) have earned Carbon Literacy certification.

Before:

The climate crisis is a critical issue, and as a local authority, ECC has a big influence on the public sector. To reflect the urgency of the crisis, ECC declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019 and is aiming to achieve Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Achieving net zero is a monumental challenge that requires cultural, structural, and procedural changes to organisations.

The biggest challenge to implementing change in a large organisation is disrupting the 'business as usual' dynamic. This involves changing the way people behave, to embed best practice within the core of all decisions and services. Carbon Literacy is a great way to address this, and it ties in seamlessly with many of ECC's Behaviours; being ambitious for the city and the council, being creative and innovative to build a better future for all, making a positive contribution towards achieving a sustainable environment, leading by example, and acting as a role model.

During:

Two officers of the Net Zero team undertook the Carbon Literacy Train the Trainer course in July 2022, and put together a roll out programme identifying the priority groups for training (e.g. Senior Management and Net Zero Ambassadors). Since then, they have successfully delivered 29 training sessions, with over 15% of the workforce having achieved Carbon Literacy qualification. Delivering training to all staff and Councillors is a huge undertaking and must be considerate of different shift schedules and time commitments.

The main challenge has been finding the staff and Councillor time for this training, amongst budget, resource and staffing cuts. The trainers have addressed this challenge by offering flexible sessions (split days, evenings, online). Effective promotion (newsletters, emails, word-of-mouth) has enabled successful implementation.

The trainers ensure that participants are engaged effectively using a variety of methods, including group activities, printouts, whiteboards, small competitive elements, and discussions. For example, to reinvigorate staff after the lunch break, the trainers created an interactive activity where several participants lined up, each holding a card with a type of food. The other trainees must put staff in order of low to high, in terms of carbon footprint. Participants enjoy this activity as it is fun, engaging and starts conversations about the environmental impact of their diet.

After:

Delivering Carbon Literacy at ECC has enabled behaviour change across all levels and services within the Council, and has empowered staff and Councillors to reduce the Council's carbon footprint. The training program has ensured that everyone is using the same terminology and is aware of the severity and scale of the climate crisis. This has empowered people to take action and change the organisational attitude towards climate change.

The program also includes opportunities for participants to share their experiences and learn from each other. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many reporting that they have learned a great deal about how to reduce their carbon footprint. One member of staff who carries out regular tree surveys

across the city committed to using their bike for all site visits, rather than a diesel car. Through their commitment, they will reduce their mileage by 787 miles per year, equating to 16 gallons of diesel and 174 kgCO₂e/year avoided. This action has also resulted in physical health benefits, reduced costs for the Council in business travel, and reduced number of cars on the road.

Other commitments that have been made as a result of the training include:

- Working to provide the City Council's Waterways service with electric boats: This will reduce the City Council's reliance on fossil fuels and help to improve air quality.
- Rolling out food waste collections to all households in Exeter: This will help to reduce food waste, a major source of methane emissions.
- Increasing the weighting of sustainability within procurement: This will ensure that the council only purchases goods and services from suppliers who are committed to sustainability.
- Advocating for the inclusion of carbon reduction measures in the Customer Experience Strategy and Internal Audit procedures: Ensuring that the City Council's policies and procedures are aligned with its climate emergency goals.
- Increasing the amount of plant-based food options available in internal and external Council outlets: This will help to reduce the City Council's reliance on meat and dairy products, which are major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions.

The City Council look forward to seeing where the Carbon Literate Organisation journey takes them, with plans to deliver more external training to community groups and local businesses in the future.