LOCAL CLIMATE ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

EVALUATION OF PART 1
2021-23

involve

UK:100

CLIMATE
outreach

Shared
Future
A Community Interest Company

CONTENTS

EVALUATION OF PART 1, 2021-23

SALLY CUPITT
26.10.23

ACRONYMS

ATC   Alcester Town Council

CG   Coaching group/member of the coaching group

DCC   Derbyshire County Council

ECC   Essex County Council

LA   Local authority

LCC   Lancaster City Council

LCE   Local Climate Engagement programme

NAG   The LCE National Advisory Group

PG   Project group/member of the project group

SCC   Sunderland City Council

SEND   Special educational needs and disabilities

W&S   Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon District Councils

WALC   Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils

WBG   Wivenhoe Biodiversity Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. THE LOCAL CLIMATE ENGAGEMENT (LCE) PROGRAMME

- From 2021-23, LCE supported 21 local authorities (LAs) to better engage the public around climate decision-making to help ensure that the UK can reach its net zero target.
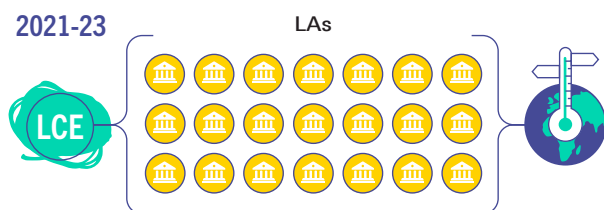
- LCE was funded by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK branch) (£250K) and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (£210K), with support for one LA part funded by Forum for the Future.

- LCE was delivered by a consortium formed by Involve, UK100, Democratic Society (Demsoc), Shared Future and Climate Outreach, supported by a national advisory group.

2021-23 LAs

£250K
Calouste Gulbenkian
Foundation (UK branch)

One LA part funded by
Forum for the Future

£210K
Esmée Fairbairn
Foundation
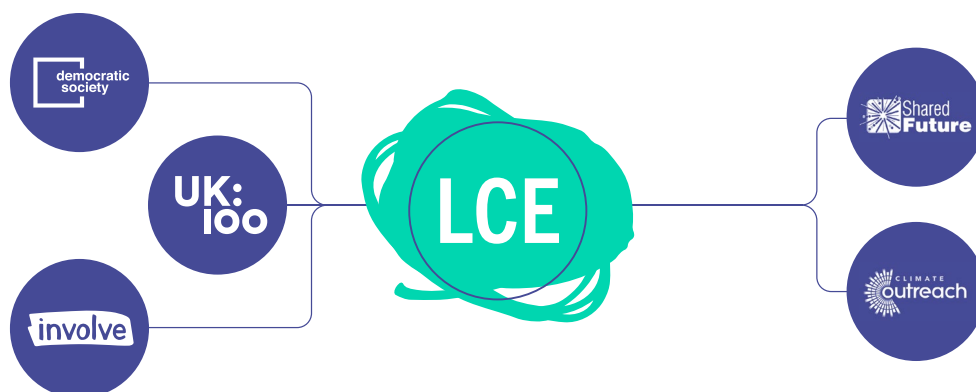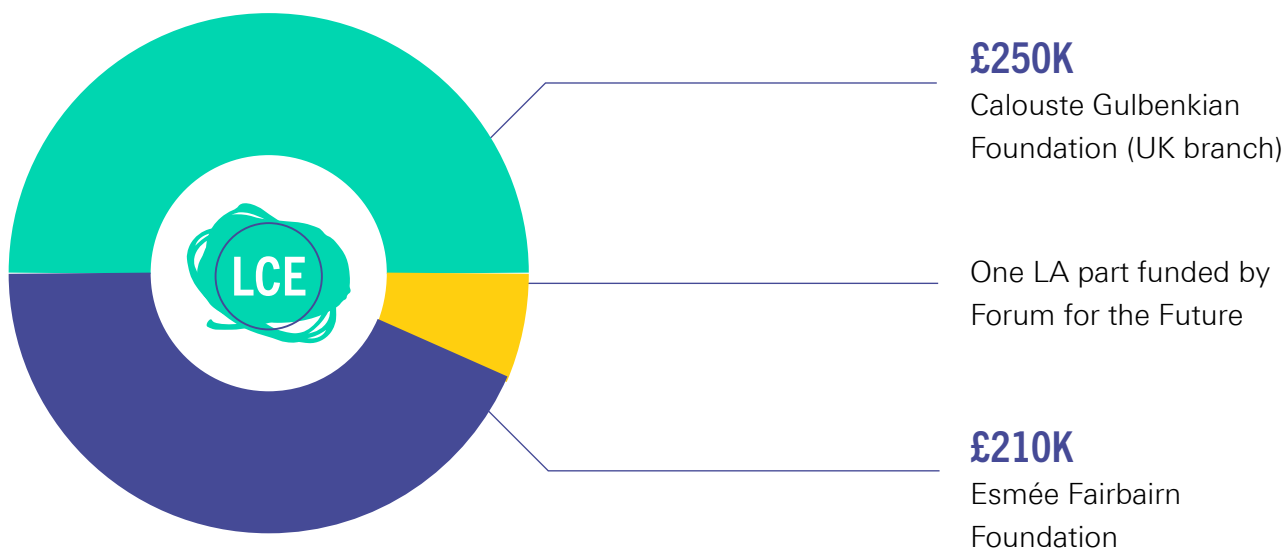
2. WHAT LCE DELIVERED

- All 21 LAs were offered three days of training (online and offline), peer support and mentoring tailored to their LA. Five 'project group' (PG) LAs got intensive input for more people, with the intention of supporting them through a specific piece of public engagement (PE). 16 'coaching group' (CG) LAs got lighter-touch support for around five people.

All
x21
LAs

x3 days training

Online

Offline

x5
(PG)
LAs

x16
(CG)
LAs
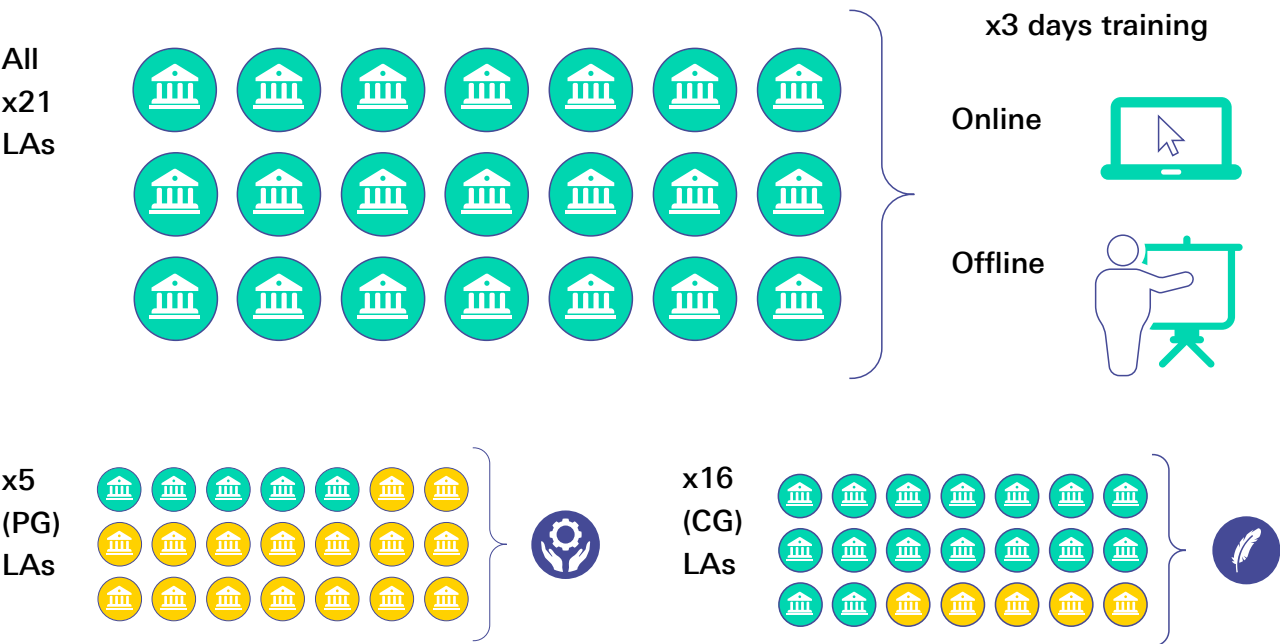
- Engagement with training was good. Engagement with some other aspects of the support was less strong. Most PGs used all their support; like a few CGs, some PGs purchased more.

- In complex circumstances, LCE staff worked hard to be flexible and to tailor to LAs needs. The LCE work with PGs took longer than expected and was being finished at time of writing.

Engagement

Training

Other support

3. WHAT LCE PARTICIPANTS THOUGHT OF THE PROGRAMME

People participating directly in LCE were mostly LA staff (officers), although some PGs also included some community partners. We interviewed 47 LCE participants, representing all PGs and 15 CGs.

- In general, PGs and CGs thought the LCE **training** was good, and particularly valued the LCE team's facilitation skills. Attendees rated the later, more practical sessions a little more highly. Some felt the training could have been slightly shorter.

- Training attendees were from a range of teams, roles and different LA tiers. This diversity was beneficial but it was not always easy to deliver content that met everyone's needs.

- LCE staff did a lot of helpful preparation prior to training. However, some LAs felt that more or different preparation – by LCE and LAs – might have been useful. Suggestions included: a stronger sense of LAs' starting needs; pre-training for some to ensure a basic understanding of climate or PE; processes in place from the start to facilitate the embedding of learning.

- **Peer support** was more successful for CGs than PGs. It worked better when people had more experience to share. Those with least experience generally got more out of it.

LAs
With less experience got more out of it

LAs
With more experience got less out of it
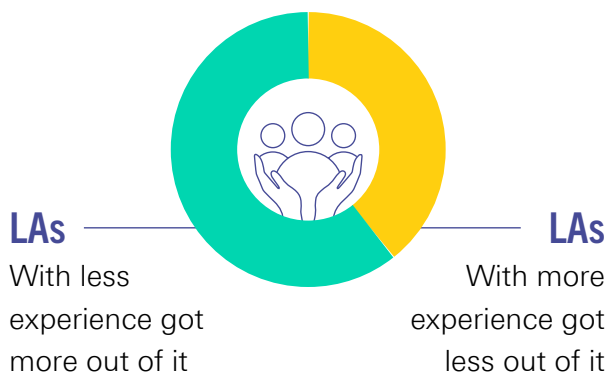
- **Mentoring** was very useful for a few CGs. Only a third of available mentoring time was used, by 9 out of 15 CGs. This was often due to a lack of live project within the mentoring offer timeframe, despite this being extended.

- Most PGs thought **LCE mentoring** after training was good, some describing it as excellent.
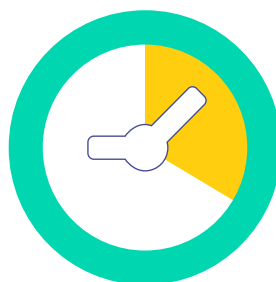
Only a third of mentoring time used by

9 OUT OF 15 CGs

- There were **delays** in all PG sites, which were frustrating for some. Delays were mainly caused by the pre-election period, staffing issues within LCE and LAs, and changes in PE project viability.

- Areas for improvement included: more participant involvement in PE activities; streamlining some aspects of the PE process; developing a shared understanding between LCE and LAs about PE, roles and processes; improving communication, particularly around PE events.
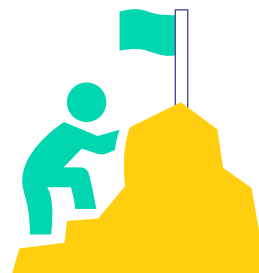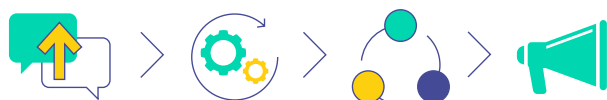
- **The LCE approach to capacity building** was very helpful to most participants. LAs and LCE staff raised some aspects for consideration:

  - Whether it's acceptable to support LAs to do imperfect PE first, or even just better informing/consultation, as a route to better PE later on.

  - Whether the LCE approach might be slightly less facilitative with more expert input.

  - Whether experiencing good PE in practice could be done in some cases without first setting out theory through training, at least where project scope is already clear. This might encourage later engagement and a focus for learning and reflection.
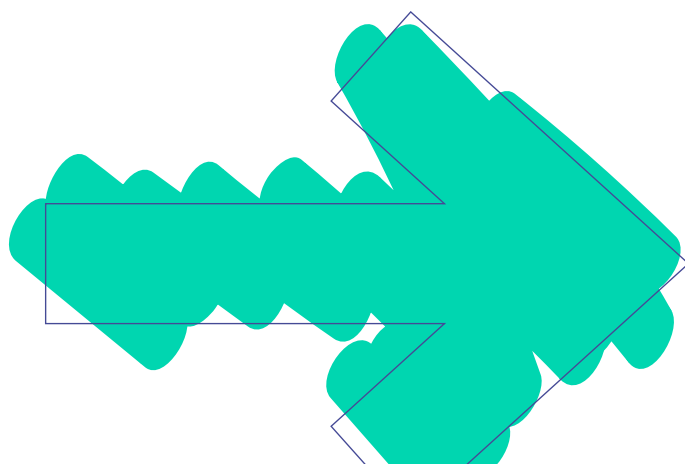
4. OUTCOMES TO DATE

It is too early to judge the full success of LCE and what changes will sustain over time. There is good potential for further changes as a result of LCE, and LCE plans to evaluate further in 2024. Some strong early outcomes have been achieved to date.

What local authorities did with their learning

x5 (PG) LAs
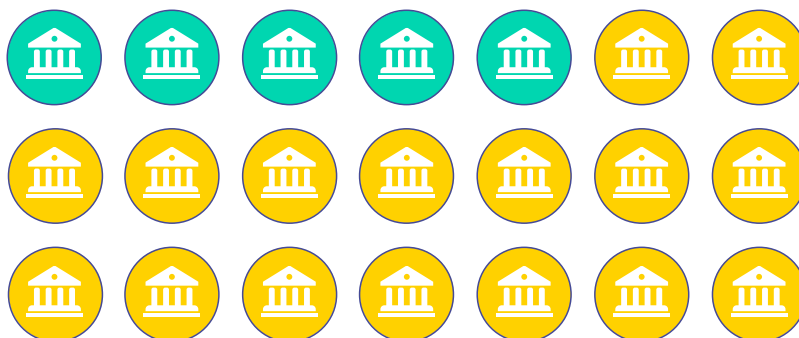
All five project group LAs implemented some PE during LCE; work is ongoing in some sites. Engagement activities undertaken by the PG with support from LCE, to end July 2023, included:

- online consultation (Lancaster, Sunderland, Derbyshire)

- pop-up stalls at events and in the street (Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon, Derbyshire)

- in-person workshops on climate or nature (Essex, Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon)

- community research done by members of the public (Lancaster)

- meetings with community groups or interested individuals (Sunderland, Derbyshire).

Most of this engagement involved significant LCE input; in two areas LCE was less able to influence the work undertaken. Some PE undertaken by the PGs would not have taken place without LCE. In some areas, the engagement undertaken was very different as a result of LCE – more interactive, accessible, open or locally focused.

This evaluation interviewed 24 members of the public who had taken part in PE delivered as part of LCE. They liked the workshops, felt able to speak and that they were listened to, and thought the facilitation was very good. Community researchers often enjoyed their conversations. Pre-event communication could have been clearer and more timely. Slow follow up after engagement activities may have risked damaging the significant motivation generated.

Online engagement got a good response rate. Pop up stalls were quite effective at reaching people, especially on a high street. Securing good attendance at workshops was difficult, perhaps at least in part because the councils felt unable to offer the recommended honorariums. This was variously due to: limited resources; wanting to trial low-cost methods; not wanting to offer payment in the context of a financial crisis.
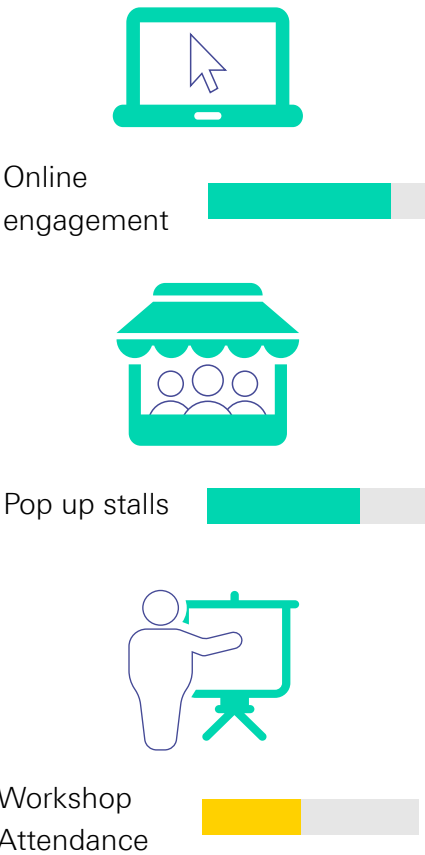
Where data existed, there was a lack of diversity in those applying to attend LCE workshops, although some activities did engage people in new locations – for example rural – so it is possible that some new people have been reached. Diversity may have been affected by the lack of honorariums, and lower overall application numbers combined with lack of diversity monitoring meant councils couldn't prioritise attendance by certain groups. Working with a relatively limited selection of community partners (either due to capacity or less community infrastructure in rural areas) may have reduced marketing reach.

Online
engagement

Pop up stalls

Workshop
Attendance
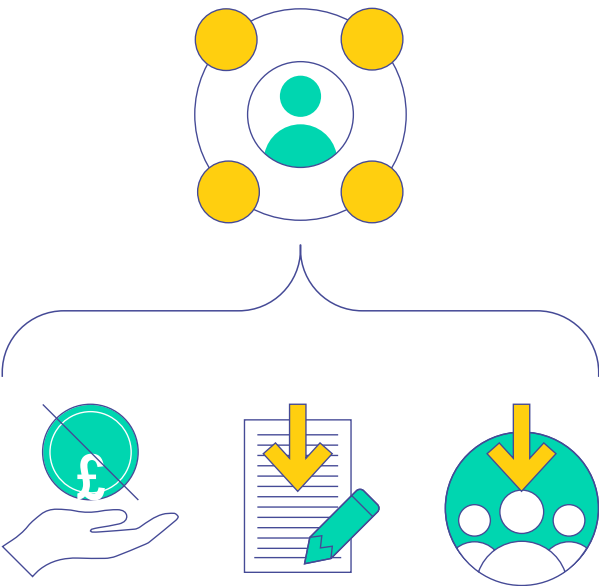
11 out of 15 CG LAs made changes as a result of LCE; some of these involved significant changes around PE for climate decision-making, or planning for PE. Given the light-touch support to CGs this is an achievement. More was implemented when CGs had people to drive the process and a live project to work on.
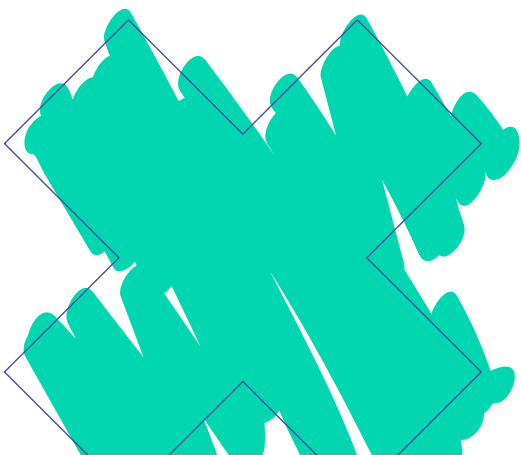
Outcomes within local authorities

- Findings from LCE PE activities have the potential to influence future LA decision making; in areas where LCE projects have progressed more quickly, work is underway to incorporate findings into local plans. Some learning was new; other findings confirmed what officers already knew, but gave weight to their proposals.

- Most CG respondents reported new learning; some had shared this in their organisations.

- Some respondents had made significant changes in approach. They reported moving 'from telling to asking' – although a few activities were still focused on informing residents. Some respondents still lacked confidence and skills to do PE on their own.

- A few local authorities said their climate work had been given new momentum.

- There are plans to replicate LCE engagement projects. Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon are also funding further support for town and parish councils to engage residents on climate.

- Going through the LCE process was valuable in itself. It improved working relationships between stakeholders, sometimes resulting in new joint work.

- Some officers reported being more able to advocate for good PE within their organisation, in part due to the credibility of LCE consortium partners.

Outcomes for local communities

The in-person LCE workshops held in two areas had a catalytic effect on some community participants and on local nature groups, with more people joining groups in both area as a result. This has the potential to further stimulate public participation in climate action.
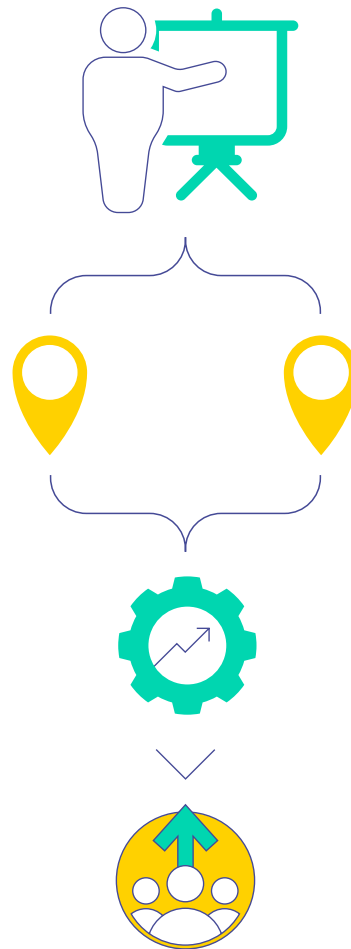
5. LEARNING FOR FUTURE PE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMMES WITH LAS

The learning listed here includes some things LCE successfully built into their programme from the start, and things that LCE learned through the programme.

- **A theory of change** for how change might happen within the LAs would aid the tailoring of support and would support evaluation and the assessment of success.

- **Minimum criteria for support** might help target support at those most likely to benefit. For intensive interventions, organisations receiving support are likely to do better if they have (or in the later point, at least a willingness to work towards):

  ○ A clear focus for change, requiring public input, in the near future.

  ○ Senior buy-in to model good practice and demonstrate commitment, and a senior sponsor engaged in the programme to troubleshoot and support implementation.

  ○ Someone to drive the work, and capacity across the whole team not just to engage with support but to meet, reflect and embed learning.

  ○ Budget for the support process and for implementation of findings.

  ○ A long-term plan for embedding learning and implementing change.

- **A recruitment process needs to ascertain whether minimum criteria are genuinely in place.** LCE found that their process – despite being quite thorough – was not always able to do this.

- **To help facilitate buy-in:**

  ○ Those receiving support may need help to identify where and how to get buy-in.

  ○ It would be helpful to be able to make an evidence-based business case for good PE.

  ○ Capacity building around PE or climate may bring particular difficulties, including: the need to help staff advocate for something that may be considered contentious; working across teams or organisations.

- **When preparing for and delivering support:**

  - A scoping phase can help tailor support to needs. But not all issues can be anticipated so a review early on in the process would be helpful.

  - While those receiving support may be usefully offered a range of offers to meet different learning needs within their organisations, they won't always know what they need so some diagnostic element may be needed.

  - Group support is efficient and can offer peer learning, but aligning project timescales can be difficult. A pick and mix support offer accessed over time may help.

  - If networking between participants is an intended outcome, then at least some in-person group support may be needed.

  - Clear and timely communication helps support engagement and increase outcomes.

- **To encourage diversity of attendees in PE activities:**

  - Working with a diverse range of community partners to market events, and providing an honorarium for participation, can help.

  - Collecting demographic data on registrants gives the option of then offering places proactively to certain groups, using selection criteria.

  - Those receiving support may need help to understand the value of reaching diverse organisations, and the role of monitoring diversity to underpin this.

- **Working within LAs** requires: time, flexibility and patience; an understanding of how LAs work, the effects of the electoral system and where power lies.

- Despite the extreme resource constraints LCE found in some LAs in this programme, they also found **a real interest in learning about better PE in climate decision-making in LAs.** There is potential for significant change in this area.

1.
INTRODUCTION
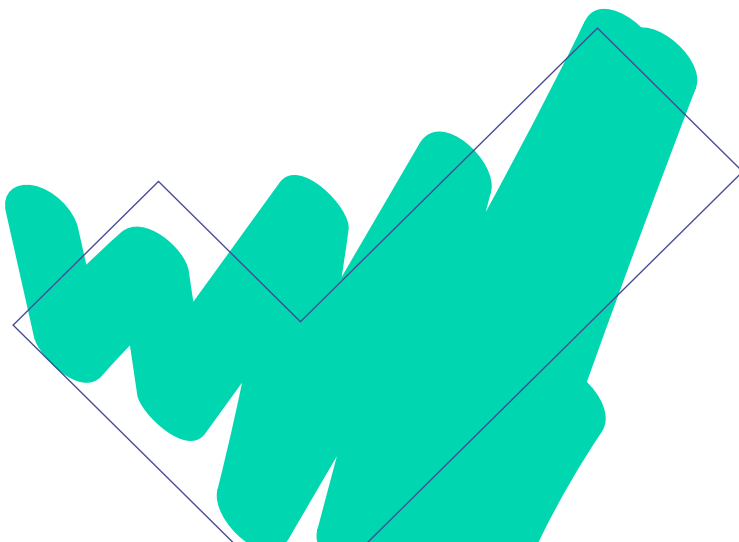
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ABOUT LCE

The Local Climate Engagement Programme (LCE) aims to help ensure that the UK can reach its net zero target. It provides local authorities and their partners in England with support to undertake or commission high quality, inclusive public engagement in climate decision-making. LCE defines this engagement as: 'ways in which local authorities (and others) enable local communities and residents to help shape their strategies, policies, services, initiatives or decisions.'

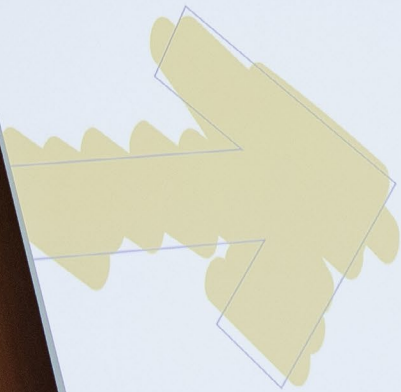Part 1 of LCE, from September 2021 to September 2023, offered direct support, including free training and mentoring, to 21 local authorities (LAs). It was funded by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK branch) (£250K) and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (£210K), with support for one of the LAs part funded by Forum for the Future. Part 2 will focus more on advocacy and communications. Part 1 is the subject of this evaluation.

LCE was led and delivered by a consortium formed by Involve, UK100, Democratic Society (Demsoc), Shared Future and Climate Outreach, supported by a national advisory group. For simplicity, when we talk about 'LCE' in this report, we mean the consortium of five partners. 'LCE staff' means a staff member from one of the partners working on LCE.

1.2 SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

This external evaluation has been undertaken by Sally Cupitt Consulting. Commissioned from July 2022 to September 2023, the evaluation aimed to:

- assess progress towards outcomes (see appendix 1)
- create learning for the continued delivery of LCE and design of future projects relating to public engagement in climate decision-making.

The evaluation has drawn primarily on:

- interviews with 24 people from 15 LAs who were part of the coaching group (see later)
- interviews with 23 people from project group LAs and some of their partners
- interviews with 24 members of the public or other councils taking part in, and sometimes helping to organise, LCE-supported engagement events
- interviews and workshops with LCE staff
- LCE programme monitoring data.

In each LA, multiple people took part in LCE. We spoke to some of these. We do not know the extent to which their views are representative.

More detail on data collection is in appendix 2.

2.
LCE PROGRAMME OFFERS AND TAKE-UP

2. LCE PROGRAMME OFFERS AND TAKE-UP

2.1 RECRUITMENT OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

There was a high level of interest from LAs in the programme; 75 applications were made for 21 places. Following shortlisting and interviews, recruitment was to two strands of work:

- 16 LAs were offered places on the coaching group (CG), which received relatively light-touch training and support from LCE for around five participants from each LA. LA participants included policy, engagement and communications staff.

- 5 LAs were offered places on the project group (PG), which received more in-depth support for around 25 participants. Group members were LA staff and other local stakeholders, including partner organisations and community organisers.

The LAs represented eight of the nine English regions (the South West was not represented), administrations from all major political parties and a range of tiers. More detail on participating LAs is in appendix 3.

2.1.1 Motivations for taking part

Most LAs signed up because they felt that meeting their carbon neutral or net zero goals would require better public engagement (PE). The perceived baseline was low among PG members (we do not have data for the CG); before the programme, only a quarter of 48 officers responding to a LCE survey[1] thought their LA was good at engaging the public in climate decision-making, with some noting that engagement involving diverse groups was a challenge. Separately, some in the CG anticipated that LCE would act as a good capacity- or team-building exercise.

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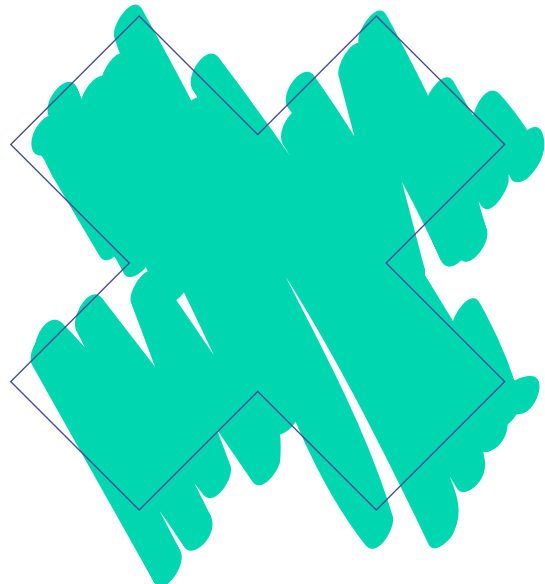
[1] The majority of respondents were from Warwick and Stratford, Derbyshire and Sunderland.

2.2 COACHING GROUP

2.2.1 CG training

CGs were each offered five places on three days of training in spring and summer 2022. A few LAs purchased a small number of extra places. The training ran five times. In four cases, different LAs received training together. In the fifth, a combined authority had separate training, with 15 participants from five organisations (primarily LAs) in the area. Some participants had in-person and online training, while others had online only. CGs each developed a project through the training; they variously chose live issues, past issues or hypothetical scenarios. More information on training content is in appendix 3.

Engagement in training was high: of 103 attendees, 87% attended at least four of six available half-day sessions.

2.2.2 Other support to CGs

CGs were also offered:

- Three **peer learning** sessions. These were well attended, with around 30 participants from 12 LAs represented each time.

- Up to seven hours of **mentoring** from LCE to help develop PE plans. About a third of the available time was used. In total, nine of the CGs took up the offer. Where it was not taken up this was often due to CGs having no live project within the mentoring offer timeframe, despite the latter being extended.

- Two-hour online **self-guided resources for councillors and senior leaders**, aiming to improve buy-in. A new experiment for LCE, take up of these appears to have been poor, with only nine people registering to use them. The majority of these were officers who had already taken part in LCE training – not the target audience. However, actual user numbers are not known, as it was possible to access the courses without registration.
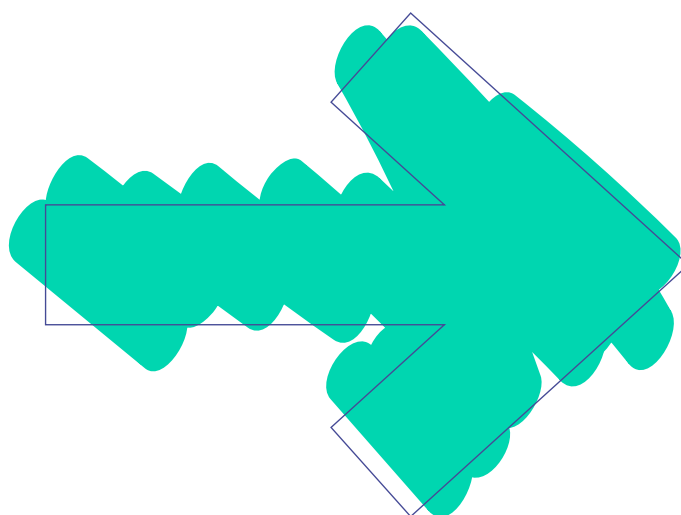
2.3 PROJECT GROUP

2.3.1 About the project group

The following LAs were recruited to the PG. They identified live projects to work on.

- **Derbyshire County Council with support from borough and district councils:** Engaging residents on how to encourage retrofit (making more energy efficient) of local owner-occupied housing.

- **Essex County Council:** Supporting three town and parish councils to consult their communities, to inform local nature plans.

- **Lancaster City Council:** Engaging residents on travel, one of five themes identified by a people's jury undertaken in 2021.

- **Sunderland City Council:** Engaging residents on three projects focused on how to encourage active travel and to reduce emissions.

- **Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon District Councils with support from Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils:** Testing mechanisms for rural participation, to galvanise rural community-led climate action and to get rural perspectives to feed into councils' plans.

2.3.2 Support offered to the PG

The five PG LAs were offered:

- The equivalent of three days of **training** in 2022, for up to 25 people from LAs and their community partners. Separate training was provided to each participating LA. Sessions were more tailored to individual LA projects and circumstances than in the CG training.

- Up to £45K worth of **mentoring support.** All but one used all or almost all of this; one used about a third. Another bought some additional support. The work took longer than expected and was being completed in Autumn 2023 in some sites.

- **Online peer support sessions.** Three were planned but only two went ahead, partly due to limited engagement. This may have been because LAs hadn't had much time to implement much learning from training and mentoring from the first session.

- The option of **training for senior leaders and councillors.** All but one took up this option.

3.
THE PROJECT GROUP: WHAT THEY ACHIEVED

3. THE PROJECT GROUP: WHAT THEY ACHIEVED

This section describes the work in the five project group (PG) areas, and the outcomes achieved. Every LA reported challenges and learning; these are reported on in sections 5 and 6.

3.1 ESSEX

3.1.1 What they did in Essex

Essex County Council (ECC) supported three local councils (Wivenhoe Town Council and Tiptree and Stisted Parish Councils) to consult their communities with the aim of informing local nature plans. All are within Essex's Climate Focus Area, in which ECC hopes to pilot a range of initiatives, showcasing what can be done to reach net zero.

With ECC input, LCE ran three four-hour in-person community workshops called 'Talking about Nature' in May 2023. Events were co-organised by LCE, the local councils and community groups. The events involved short talks, followed by facilitated group work to develop and prioritise ideas (see right). LCE will produce a report on the workshop findings and a toolkit for parishes wishing to run similar events.

'Talking about Nature' Essex Event.

3.1.2 Who they engaged in the Essex events

ECC, local councils and community groups worked hard to promote the workshops. On average, 21 people attended each event, sufficient to run good events but not as many as hoped. It may be that some small changes to event marketing could have increased attendance. Of 15 event participants we interviewed a month afterwards, most felt the events could have been better advertised, for example through clearer messaging on posters or the use of more local banners.

Although a range of efforts was made to ensure events were inclusive, including providing user-friendly information materials and a point of contact for access needs requests, the events did not attract a very diverse group of people. The majority of participants were over 45 and white, 75% were female, and most came from one- and two-person households. Of the 15 participants we interviewed, all but one was already involved in nature or environment activities, and almost half had previously given their views to a council. Four had been councillors or worked for a council. Similarly, ECC's monitoring data was in accordance with LCE's, as it showed that only one of 54 respondents described themselves as 'not very concerned' about climate; the rest were all fairly or very concerned.

'Talking about Nature' Essex Event.

The LCE model aimed for event oversubscription, to allow purposive selection to ensure the demographic profile of each parish was represented by the attendees. However, due to low numbers registering their interest to attend each event, this was only possible, and only to a small degree, at one event.

It may be that a more targeted approach to advertising, for example to schools or food banks, might have generated a more diverse range of applicants. Earlier finalisation of event design would also have helped allow time for wider promotion to targeted groups (see 5.2.4). The decision not to pay honorariums – which were felt to be difficult in the context of a financial crisis – may have contributed.

3.1.3 What community participants thought of the Essex events

This section is based on 62 participant surveys collected by LCE at the events and on our interviews with 15 of the participants, one month later.

Overall, participants really enjoyed the events:

- In survey, the majority rated the event (89%) and the facilitation highly (94%).

- In interviews, many commented on the skills of the LCE facilitators. One said their table lead was a 'skilled, sensitive, thorough lead; [they were] superb'.

- Some mentioned liking the speakers, and several wanted more time for them, however the shortening of the events at design phase didn't allow for this.

- All interviewees felt able to speak up, felt listened to and some noted that the facilitators were good at managing louder and quieter voices. All survey respondents thought their time was valued.

- Three of our interviewees had previous experience of council or government consultations and thought the LCE events were better; better run, genuinely seeking to involve people in local decisions, and more inclusive in language and content.

"I've been to a lot of things like that, both during my career but also since, and it was undoubtedly one of the best things like that, that I have ever been a part of. And I think for that [the organising team] need to be applauded."

More information needed before and after events

Some participants wanted more information about the event in advance, including its purpose and objectives. Some thought that more information on next steps at the end of the event and more/more timely follow-up communication afterwards would have been helpful.

Some confidence their input would be used

Immediately after the events, most survey respondents thought their input would be used: 73% thought it might make a positive difference to nature plans. Interviewees, a month after the events, were more cautious. A few were clear they felt their views would be used. One of the community organisers felt confident because they had already had a role in shaping the direction of the workshop:

"I am quite confident because our small group had already prioritised all our concerns, all the things we wanted to do. We'd timed them and we'd very roughly costed them. … And [LCE] had that. And so they used our documents as the basis for their questioning"

The majority were a little less confident about their input being used. Most felt the intent was good, but that cash-strapped councils, who may also face pressures from business and developers, might find it difficult to implement changes.

3.1.4 Outcomes in Essex

How the event findings will be used

The priorities raised in the workshops will be used by the three local councils to create nature plans by spring 2024. ECC has agreed to give each council a grant of £750 to contribute to the priorities, as an alternative to honorariums to event participants.

Outcomes for local authorities in Essex

ECC is hoping to **replicate the work** with other parishes and communities in the Climate Focus Area. There is also evidence of motivation within at least one of the three pilot areas to **share their learning** with other areas. A Wivenhoe town councillor reported being very focused on enabling other councils to hit the ground running with nature recovery plans, using learning from the Wivenhoe experience.

ECC respondents reported that they now have **stronger relationships** with people in the three areas. They also now have a **better understanding of residents' priorities.** One ECC officer noted that it was good to have climate-related conversations with communities about nature instead of concerns about development. That they had got down to such a local level was due to LCE:

"I don't think we would have gone into that detail with three parishes [without LCE]. … Initially, we thought it was going to be at district and borough level and county level. So we wouldn't have dived into local communities. And I think that's been beneficial to understand how local people work"

There is evidence that, as a result of taking part in the events, some residents may be **more willing to engage with their local authorities**, although this effect may reduce over time:

• In the survey, almost all attendees said they were more willing to take part in consultations in future.

• A month after the events, we asked participants whether being involved had changed their view of the council; opinions varied. One felt it had reinforced their view that local authorities were slow and not joined up. A few said it made them feel more positive, putting faces to names and seeing their council was interested in nature. One, recently moved to a small village, was pleasantly surprised at the power they had:

"If you're living in London, your voice gets lost, but actually here, you can say things and through having a parish council, you can change things. And I realised that, by getting involved with our own group, we actually have quite a lot of power to make a difference here."

Wivenhoe, Essex

Outcomes for local communities

Most survey respondents had **increased their understanding of nature plans** at the events, although a sizeable minority (15%) had not – perhaps because they already had a good understanding. Interviewees had learned about their local area and about council plans. Several appreciated hearing the views of other residents. The majority of interviewees were planning to do more about nature and the environment as a result of attending an event.

The events had a **catalytic effect on local nature groups.** One in Wivenhoe had eight new members as a result of the event, while another in Stisted had two and anticipated involving more. In Tiptree, where we are not aware of a local group, two respondents noted that attending had made them more motivated. One explained that: 'if somebody had said, "Will you sign up to do something?" I would have done!'

There is some evidence from Wivenhoe that local action on climate may change the views and behaviour of other residents, as described below. It may be that the involvement of new members in Essex nature groups, as contributed to by the LCE events, will help to bring about more such local change.

WIVENHOE BIODIVERSITY GROUP: INTRODUCING 'NO MOW, NO SOW'

- The Wivenhoe Biodiversity Group (WBG) has 33 members (8 of whom joined as a result of the LCE workshop), and support from a Wivenhoe town councillor and a professional ecologist.

- They wanted to reduce the level of mowing locally to increase biodiversity. Wivenhoe Town Council was supportive. WBG held an online meeting with around 30 residents to explain their plans.

- In 2021 the Council stopped mowing 15 open spaces; in 2022, this was extended to 15 stretches of residential verges outside people's houses and a large main road. As well as 'no mow' they adopted a 'no sow' approach, not sowing new plant species.

Wivenhoe, Essex

- Volunteers compared the biodiversity of mown and unmown areas; in the first year, they found 141 visible species in unmown areas and five times as many flower heads compared to the mown areas (see right).

- WBG monitored public opinion through comments on Facebook. The majority of comments were positive, although some were initially more negative concerning the residential verges. Many fewer comments were received in year two, leading organisers to speculate that the 'no mow' approach was becoming accepted by local residents.

3.2 WARWICK AND STRATFORD-ON-AVON

3.2.1 What they did in Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon

Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon District Councils (W&S) wished to use LCE to kick start a planned rural climate engagement project, testing methods for rural engagement.

The LCE training was attended by 25 council officers, councillors, parish officers and clerks, and local community group members, many of whom went on to form a steering group to run the project. W&S additionally paid for ten hours of support per week from an officer at Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC). Stakeholders commented that the project could not have been delivered without this.

Climate Engagement Event, Warwick

With database support from Forum for the Future, an asset mapping exercise engaged 48 local (town and parish) councils; the steering group identified three of these to take part in the project. A working group was created to help organise the pilots, with community representatives bringing local intelligence and capacity. It was hoped that, by shadowing LCE staff through this process, local stakeholders would increase their skills in PE.

W&S and local stakeholders ran three engagement events:

- A three-hour climate CAFE (Climate Action For Everyone) workshop in Alcester, at which small groups discussed topics including sustainable transport (see right). LCE facilitated this event.
- Two pop-up stalls, one at a green event in Marston Sicca village, and one on Henley-in-Arden high street. These engaged 26 and 122 members of the public respectively. Volunteers staffing the stalls engaged passers by in activities, and asked about their views on climate change and actions the community might take.
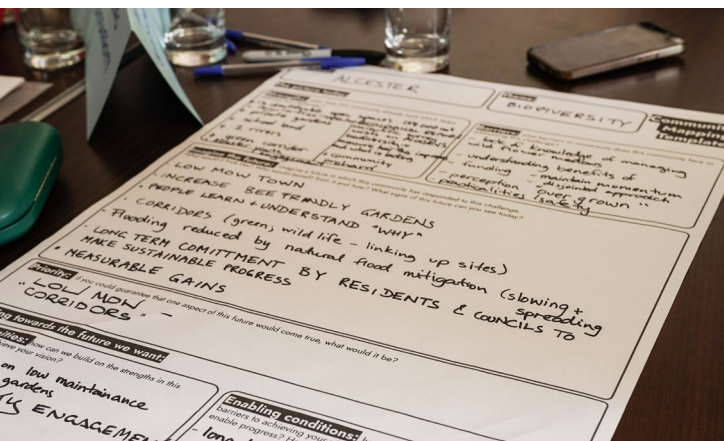
Climate Engagement Event, Warwick

3.2.2 Who they engaged in the W&S events

No participant demographic data was available, so it is not possible to say how inclusive the events were. However, the project collected rural residents' views in a way not done before. The event at Henley-in-Arden was considered by most respondents to have engaged a wide range of people, by virtue of having been in the high street on a Saturday.

Despite organisers working hard to raise interest and make the event accessible (for example, by offering childcare, leafleting less-affluent parts of the town and providing lunch), there was poor resident attendance at the Alcester event. Stakeholders suggested that more local advertising and a participant gift of thanks might have encouraged more people to come. They also speculated that calling it a 'climate change' event may have put some people off – using 'nature' may have made it more appealing.

As a result of limited interest from residents, local councillors were invited. Although this was not the original intention, it has had some very positive early outcomes (see below).

3.2.3 What participants thought of the W&S events

This data is drawn from interviews with eight residents in the three areas. All had attended the events, some also co-organised them. Some were local councillors.

The pop-ups were generally thought to have gone well, especially the one in Henley-in-Arden High Street. Despite the issues with resident attendance, the Alcester CAFE event went very well. Participants enjoyed the event, felt able to speak up and participate, and thought the facilitator was very good. A few recommendations for improvement were made:

One interviewee felt the event could have been run in a more environmentally friendly way, with fewer paper forms and a locally-based videographer.

A few felt that more interaction might have been helpful across small group tables and between community participants and councillors, to 'cross pollinate' ideas. One local council would have appreciated more efforts to facilitate better networking, for example through introductions or a contacts sheet.

Some Alcester participants said they had received no follow-up communication when we interviewed them a month after the event, and were disappointed by this; lack of this may have risked damaging the momentum created.

> *"Getting that [communication] out quickly, with, very clear action points. 'This is actually what we're doing.' I think it's really important that we see some tangible things come out of this."*

3.2.4 Outcomes in Warwick and Stratford

Learning and skills

Stakeholders who had been through the LCE programme reported having learned a lot about community engagement principles, tools and methods. One explained that LCE had changed the way their team thinks about PE:

> *"It's not us talking at people, it's us talking to people and listening to people. … It's not just us standing behind a desk, saying 'talk to us about the content of this leaflet'. … It's changed the dynamic of how we engage with the public."*

A WALC officer described being more confident in using methods to reach more diverse groups:

> *"[What we learned through LCE meant we were] able to communicate with confidence that we were doing the right thing, because it goes in the face of pretty much every other engagement exercise, which is you put something on and you make it open to everybody. Because that's fair, as opposed to: but this is equitable. And actually, if we are trying to prioritise those most in need, we need to make it easier for them and also prioritise them and their needs."*

Those shadowing LCE staff did learn through the experience, but reported not get all the delivery skills they had hoped for, with several saying they would struggle to replicate something like the Alcester event on their own. Several felt there had been insufficient chance for this group to learn facilitation skills from LCE.

Improved working relationships

The W&S steering group comprised mainly of people who had previously attended the LCE training. As a result of going through the programme together, interviewees reported improved working relationships, some leading to working on new joint projects.

We do not have evidence to say whether the three events changed residents' views on their local councils. However one local councillor, involved in one of the pop-ups, felt that it was very helpful for their council to have a visible presence around climate change:

> *"Having that visible presence is definitely helpful. … We were in a prime location to show that we as the parish council and the district councils are doing some positive work around climate change. … A lot of people commented on the day saying, 'it's great you guys are doing this'. So definitely it has [had] a positive effect for us."*

Outcomes for local councils and associations

WALC

Working with county associations like WALC appears to have real potential to disseminate learning. A WALC officer reported sharing LCE training materials with some of the town and parish councils who are WALC's members. She had also put a regular feature on climate engagement into WALC's member newsletter; she might have done this without LCE, but 'I probably wouldn't have had my ear to the ground in the same way'.

Alcester Town Council (ATC)

We spoke to two representatives from ATC, who hosted one of the LCE pilot events. Involvement in LCE has the potential to really energise their work on climate, in part because of the unanticipated participation of a number of ATC councillors at the Alcester event.

One ATC interviewee explained that they declared a climate emergency in 2022, but 'it didn't really change anything'. Both interviewees reported initially not being sure how to get started in climate, having concerns that as a small council they couldn't do anything. One interviewee explained that the event had motivated ATC:

> *"We went from a council saying 'we don't know how to get started' to [having] a hard core of councillors now that are really very committed to it. We had a council meeting on Tuesday. And it was on the agenda and there was a report about the Alcester event. And the councillor who led on this said, 'who wants to join the working group?' and five people put their hands up. And that's real progress, because before I was really doing the working group on my own."*

The Mayor of Alcester said that the event helped ATC 'focus on what we could do', and that some of the points raised in the event will be included in their planning. He explained that 'we will be able to factor in climate change more readily into the neighbourhood development plan, which will be in place for another four years'.

Henley-in-Arden Parish Council

Henley hosted one of the LCE pop-up days. A local councillor reported that the event had been very useful in providing 'some great data that we can use for pushing forward future priorities'. This process had already begun; a project that had been meeting resistance had seen some progress as a result of the data collected at the event.

The future in Warwick and Stratford

W&S have agreed to fund a new project, South Warwickshire Climate Engagement. Details were still being worked out at the time of writing, but we understand this project will support rural communities to undertake PE and climate actions. It will also be a route for the two district councils to find out about the needs and interests of their rural communities.

3.3 LANCASTER

3.3.1 What they did in Lancaster

Lancaster City Council (LCC) had undertaken a people's jury on climate in 2021 that came up with recommendations in five themes. They chose one of these, travel, as the focus of their LCE work. They planned three engagement activities: community explorers, Polis and a series of 'Digging Deeper' deliberative workshops.

Community explorers

Six people were recruited to work, paid, as citizen researchers called 'community explorers'. Five had taken part in the people's jury. LCC considered an open recruitment process but chose the five as they were keen and had had some basic training. A sixth explorer was from the council's Community Connectors team.

LCE offered 1.5 days of training to the explorers which included refining five questions to ask their local communities (see below). Explorers went on to have 135 conversations with members of the public wherever they met them – at work, at bus stops, in a cafe or the gym, for example.

We interviewed three explorers. One spoke about their enthusiasm and commitment to the work: 'I got into it. … I spent a month living, eating, sleeping and thinking about this'. Explorers explained the importance of seizing the moment and described several instances where they had spoken to people opportunistically. For example:

> "*I was walking along an area where there isn't any pavement and there ought to be. And it was a sort of rutted, grassy, muddy verge by a busy road. And there was a young woman coming along with two children. ... And I just said to her, 'wouldn't you like to see a pavement here? Make it easier for you?' And she said, 'Oh, well, I would you know', and so I got talking to her. And I said, 'would you mind filling in one of these forms?' She said 'I feel so strongly about this area because it's so dangerous. If you can do anything, it will just be amazing.' [Later] they handed me the forms.*"

After the community research, LCE facilitated an event at which the explorers analysed their findings. There was some concern from explorers that analysis focused on the common views and may have placed less emphasis on the experiences of people in less common situations, for example wheelchair users.
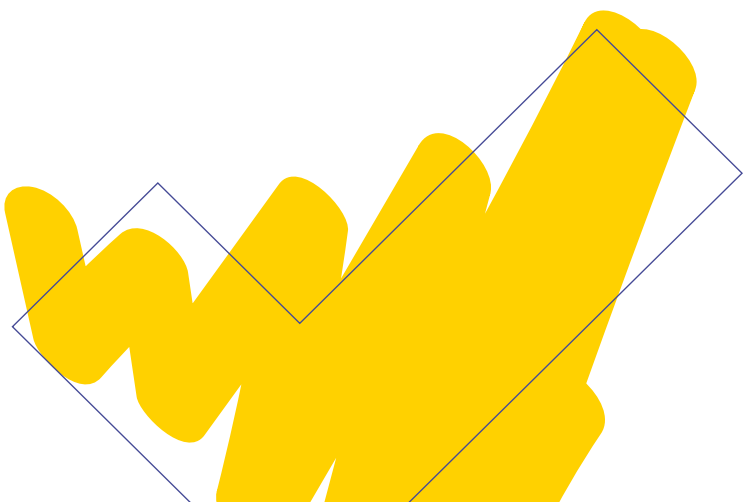
Polis

LCE trained some members of the LCC planning team on Polis online consultation software, in which members of the public are able to submit responses to an overarching question, voting on statements they agree with so helping to identify possible areas of consensus. The LCC planning team then ran online workshops with community groups to create 30 travel statements to start the conversation on Polis; respondents could then add their own.

Digging Deeper; Deliberative Workshops

Through wide engagement via Polis and the community explorers, two key issues emerged of particular importance to local residents: bus services and how to make it feel safer locally for people to walk and cycle. To dig deeper into these issues, people's jury members, explorers and some council staff participated in a series of three evening workshops for each issue, producing a set of ideas for action. These workshops were ongoing at the time of writing.

3.3.2 Who they engaged in Lancaster

LCE helped LCC map potential stakeholders and discuss ways to market Polis. As a result, LCC undertook extensive marketing activities for Polis, with many teams sending it out through their networks and social media channels. The LCC chief executive also featured in a promotional video. The work was successful, generating quite high levels of engagement; 524 people voted, with an average of 80 votes per voter. Respondents submitted an additional 400 statements.

Several LCC officers felt that the explorers 'definitely' reached people the council wouldn't have:

> *"People aren't going to talk to us as a council like they talk to them. … People were probably more open. Like they got better conversation happening. If we were to do it, conversation would have been more likely around complaints."*

We cannot comment on whether the Polis consultation included diverse groups as there was no demographic data on those who engaged. Demographic questions were not included so that the consultation survey could be kept short to maximise responses. There was some attempt to target diverse groups, for example one council officer used Polis on tablets with residents queuing at food clubs to support them to use the platform.

3.3.3 What the explorers thought of LCE

The three community explorers we interviewed generally enjoyed their work. The LCE training they received was considered quite helpful, although much was 'common sense'. They all appreciated working together on the questions to be used in their conversations. However, they felt the questions could have been better, perhaps because of the limitations of a participatory approach – one noted that it was hard to be critical when creating them in a room together.

One of the explorers felt that project communication – it's not clear whether this was from LCE or LCC – might have been clearer, with details of events provided earlier than they had been.

Most of the explorers had been part of the LCC people's jury in 2021. A perceived lack of action immediately following that event made explorer interviewees concerned that their own findings would not be acted on:

> *"People are already saying to me, 'it will be a waste of time'. That was their initial reaction before I even set off and I had to cajole them and persuade them into, 'well, let's give it a try'. … A few months down the line, quite rightly, they are going to be thinking, well, by now, there should be some sort of progress on all of this. … I hope I'm going to be able to give them something positive to say."*

3.3.4 Outcomes in Lancaster

Work in Lancaster should finish this autumn, so the key intended outcome of making better decisions informed by public input is yet to be realised. However, officers described some early outcomes.

An LCC officer felt strongly that they wouldn't have been able to undertake the work without the motivation, resources and credibility brought by LCE:

> *"Without programmes like [LCE], we couldn't do the same innovative work. Over the past several years, projects I have been involved in which have been very innovative, [that] have got national attention and where we've had really good community engagement, have been done in partnership or had additional funding by an external organisation. I cannot emphasise how important programmes like [LCE] are. They allow us to deliver engagement with wider breadth and depth which in turn helps us to better work with communities and deliver services. There are a lot of barriers to delivering engagement, from capacity to funding to trust to just getting people motivated. … The external resources help bring excitement and interest and deliver quality engagement programmes. [Without the external resources from capacity to funding,] … we wouldn't be able to do it at the same level. … Programmes such as LCE are really critical and help us better engage with residents and make sure their voices are included in steering and shaping the work we do."*

Energising existing initiatives

In 2020 LCC set up a 'climate change hub', involving around 30 people from different council teams who now meet online regularly to work on climate change-related issues in a joined-up way. An LCC officer felt that one of the biggest benefits of their involvement in LCE was the energising effect it had on this group. For example, LCE met with the hub to work on how to increase PE around Polis:

"It was great when [LCE] came to one of the hub sessions, engaging officers as to how they would / we should engage to get the most out of the travel and climate change conversation we were planning for the residents of Lancaster District. It was enlightening to listen to colleagues vocalise their views and come with great suggestions with many offering: 'I'm going to do this…', I thought, 'Oh, this is how it should be – colleagues are actually getting this message out as part of their job role'. I think we will see more of this because of LCE programme."

Thinking differently

The chief executive at LCC explained how LCE had helped their Council understand the need for different messaging to engage different groups in climate discussions. They went on to explain how LCE had made them think differently about what constitutes real engagement:

"So it's shifted our thinking significantly. … Councils aren't always that good at consultation, but we have to consult on a lot of things. So we use the traditional website surveys and public hall meetings, which ticks the box for consultation and engagement, but isn't really consultation and engagement in the broader sense. … The work that we're undertaking at the moment [with LCE] has really shifted our view on what consultation and engagement could look like."

Putting negative outcomes in perspective

An LCC officer felt that the open nature of Polis, whereby respondents can add their own ideas, was refreshing and helpful, even if it felt challenging at times. They also explained that the method allowed them to get any negative community feeling into perspective:

"[If people have] a strong negative opinion, they put it out there. People don't tend do that if they have a positive opinion. … Polis was really good, because [we found that] quite a small proportion of people had strong negative opinions around climate focused proposals. Most of the opinions were very positive. And so Polis is a really neat tool to be able to show that. … We have to respond to the negative things and make sure they are included perspectives, and [they] may also help steer where we need to do engagement. But it doesn't mean we need to stop a programme."

Plans for the future

The community explorers and Polis have provided useful data for LCC. Some of this highlighted what they already knew, but it has given them data showing people's views to argue for a case:

"It's helpful to be able to have this nice piece of explorers' data to say, actually, this is something that we need to care about, because our community cares about that. So I think it will be useful for me in my role, and the way that I advocate for infrastructure delivery."

LCE has written reports for LCC on the Polis and explorer findings and more are planned for the deliberative workshops; the cabinet will decide on next steps. LCC also wants to embed their learning about these new PE methods for use within LCC more widely. LCE has created a microsite for LCC based on the training.

3.4 SUNDERLAND

3.4.1 What they did in Sunderland

Sunderland City Council (SCC) had already planned three active travel projects. Following LCE training for 20 participants, plus some design sprints, they hoped to plan and deliver these differently. At the time of writing the first two were well underway. The projects were:

- Encouraging use of a new cycleway. The design of the cycleway was already fixed o a certain extent, but SCC consulted residents about ways to improve the route and make it more accessible. The engagement also focused on how to encourage people to cycle.

- Encouraging greener travel for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). They have a statutory right to transport to and from school which is often taken in the form of diesel taxis. The project has engaged with parents and children and is about to pilot alternative travel choices with around 20 families.

- Social prescribing to encourage walking and cycling. This project was at a relatively early stage at the time of the evaluation interview.

3.4.2 Outcomes in Sunderland

The LCE projects in Sunderland are still ongoing, so realisation of outcomes will take some time. However, officers reported that the cycleway project, in particular, has changed dramatically as a result of their involvement in the programme, as described below.

SUNDERLAND CYCLE PROJECT: A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN APPROACH

SCC officers and LCE staff both noted a significant shift in approach in the cycleway project. One added that 'there's a really clear story arc that you can say, if we hadn't done LCE, it definitely would not look like this'.

With the support of LCE and the SCC communications team, SCC took a more interactive, accessible approach to the cycleway consultation than they had used in previous projects. They sent out information to a larger number of people, in different formats (including an interactive document) and tried to make it really easy to understand. For example, instead of black and white maps, they used visual representations of what the cycleway will look like from street level. SCC officers explained how the cycleway team worked hard to seek and use community feedback:

> *"They're trying really hard to ask questions. Rather than saying to people, 'this is what we're doing', they say 'what is it you need? And how can we help?' … They've tried really hard to listen to feedback. Even when the project is finished, they are still tweaking it. Somebody will say, 'well, this doesn't work because we use trikes and we need a dropped curb. They've been like 'we didn't know there were going to be tricycle users here, we will change that, this bollard will be moved and this curb will be dropped'."*

Plans don't stop there. At time of writing SCC was planning to hold further engagement events to try and build on the momentum around cycling and active travel, including at a World Triathlon Champion Series hosted in Sunderland. They hope to engage with the public about the project in advance, to address concerns and explain the rationale. They are also planning to work with local primary schools to engage children and their parents in the cycleway.

The project has also helped develop better relationships between the council and some stakeholders. The cycleway team worked with a local church who had some questions on the project. When the church mentioned they needed more road markings and parking bays nearby, the team offered to help arrange this.

According to SCC officers, the cycleway team has put in the extra time required for meaningful consultation because they see that there are likely future benefits:

"[The cycleway team] has said before that their interactions [with the community] were nearly all negative. … They think as a way of doing it, [PE] is more fulfilling and will allow them to do a better job: they really want to do a good job. I do also think that it does take more time, but they are invested in the idea of investing to save. If we spend more time doing it well now, it will actually save us time and energy and resource and the challenges later on."

Other changes

According to SCC officers, as with the cycleway project the children's greener SEND travel project asked parents and carers about their ideas rather than focusing on getting feedback on SCC-generated ideas. A stakeholder involved in the social prescribing project explained how they might do things differently, by focusing climate discussions on cost of living, a key area of concern for local residents.

In our interviews, and in a learning event held in Sunderland, officers described better cross-team understanding and working, leading to important linking up that hadn't happened before. One officer explained that it was 'no good us all doing PE in silos, we need a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach.'

Next steps

As a result of these LCE-informed projects, SCC hopes for changes like better utilised cycle lanes and young people with SEND travelling differently. Beyond the pilots, SCC officers plan to share the learning and tools created via LCE throughout the council so others can do more meaningful engagement. They hope staff on the three pilots may act as champions to advise new projects.
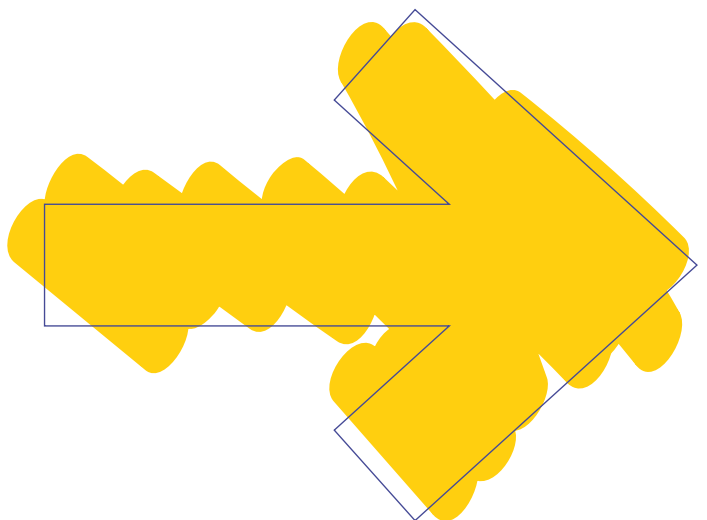
3.5 DERBYSHIRE

3.5.1 What they did

Derbyshire County Council (DCC) invited around 20 people on the LCE training, including representatives from 12 other statutory and voluntary organisations, including neighbouring LAs. Afterwards, they formed an officers' working group. To consult their residents about retrofit (improving the energy efficiency) of owner-occupied properties, DCC undertook quite extensive activities, including:

- three online consultations

- face-to-face and online meetings with community groups, both environmental and not, for example the Women's Institute

- one-to-one meetings with interested individuals

- pop up street surveys.

3.5.2 Who they engaged

DCC estimated that thousands of people were involved in their activities; a precise count was not available as some residents engaged in more than one way.

DCC took care to make language more accessible and had a clear call to action. They did not do anything else differently in terms of making the activities more accessible for specific groups. DCC felt at that time that the supply chain for retrofit was not big enough, so would only be able to meet the need of early adopters. As a result, DCC took a pragmatic decision only to target this group in their engagement activities.

3.5.3 Outcomes in Derbyshire

DCC officers and partners identified a range of outcomes of the project:

- **Useful data for their next steps.** Findings from their activities reinforced what they already knew but also provided new learning. On the basis of the findings they drafted an action plan, which was shared with residents for comment.

- **Credibility.** Having the involvement of UK100 (a LCE consortium partner) and external facilitators of the process, gave LCE credibility with their elected members.

- **The process was, in some ways, as important as the outcome.** Respondents explained that the collaborative nature of the project, and the fact that it brought participants together to focus on a shared issue, were real strengths of the training. It brought different perspectives, 'joined dots' that they might not otherwise have, and helped them develop a shared language. Within DCC it also led to more conversations with other teams on climate and PE.

"We were from diverse organisations, across the region, and we had a common purpose, which was about improving the energy efficiency of homes. That felt different, because we were there for a very specific reason. And we had a job to do. So that's what made it different, that we were looking at engagement through the lens of what we wanted to do."

- **New initiatives.** Since LCE, some of the stakeholders involved are putting in a consortium bid for some funding for a project related to energy use. As a result of the shared understanding and trust build up through LCE, they could just 'get straight into it; we all knew what we were talking about. … That's been really, really valuable, you really can't underestimate that'.

- **Thinking differently.** Several respondents noted that, through LCE, they had come to see engagement 'as a process in itself, rather than an add on'. They felt that this process was more embedded in their organisations, something likely to improve future PE.

3.6 PROJECT GROUP: SUMMARY

This final section summarises learning from across the five project group areas.

3.6.1 The public engagement undertaken during LCE

• Some PE undertaken by the PGs would not have taken place without LCE. In some areas, the engagement undertaken was very different as a result of LCE – more interactive, accessible, open or locally focused.

• Participants liked the workshops run through LCE, felt able to speak and that they were listened to, and thought the facilitation was very good. Community researchers often enjoyed their conversations.

• Online engagement methods got a good response rate. Pop up stalls were quite an effective way to reach people, especially when run on a high street. Securing good attendance at workshops was difficult, perhaps at least in part because the councils felt unable to offer the recommended honorariums.

• We have no baselines for participant diversity in previous PE undertaken by the PG areas, but there was a lack of diversity in those attending the workshops. This may have been in part due to lack of honorariums or the reach of marketing. However, activities did engage people in different locations (e.g. rural) so it is likely that some new people have been reached.

• Pre-event communication could have been clearer and more timely. Slow follow up after engagement activities risks damaging the significant motivation generated.

• There was little evidence of PGs collecting data on the quality of impact of their PE, beyond data for this evaluation. One did collect data on the diversity of community participants.

3.6.2 Outcomes to date

It is still too early to know all the outcomes for PGs, or what will sustain over time.

Outcomes for local authorities

- PE findings have the potential to influence future decision making in PG areas; in areas where LCE projects have progressed more quickly, work is underway to incorporate findings into local plans. Some learning was new; other findings confirmed what officers already knew, but gave weight to their proposals.

- A few local authorities said their climate work had been given new momentum.

- There are some plans to replicate LCE engagement projects. Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon are also funding further support for local councils to engage residents on climate.

- Going through the LCE process was valuable in itself. It improved working relationships between stakeholders, sometimes resulting in new joint work.

- Many respondents described learning through LCE and some had made significant changes in approach. Some reported moving 'from telling to asking' – although some PG activities were still focused on informing residents rather than engaging them in decision-making. Some PG respondents still lacked confidence and skills to do PE on their own.

Outcomes for local communities

- Most people taking part in workshops said their understanding of climate issues had improved.

- The in-person workshops in Essex had a catalytic effect on some community participants and on local nature groups, with more people joining the groups as a result.

4.
OUTCOMES IN THE COACHING GROUP

4. OUTCOMES IN THE COACHING GROUP

This data is drawn primarily from interviews with 24 LA officers who were part of the CG.

4.1 LEARNING

Most CG respondents said the LCE programme had given them new knowledge. Some said it had consolidated, validated or refreshed existing knowledge. Key programme messages were mentioned in interview by participants as significant learning points:

• One especially valued the learning around **messaging appropriate to different target audiences,** as well as thinking about the messenger:

"The thing that I really took away was that fundamentally, as a council, we're perhaps not the right people to be delivering a lot of these messages. They are sometimes better coming from members of the community, church leaders, or people who run activity groups or that type of thing."

• Another had learned about **different ways to communicate.**

"I'm okay with numbers. I'm okay with data. I believe my graphs communicate lots of stuff. But it turns out that they don't! (Laughs) I need to find other ways of communicating what I'm trying to say, which I'm trying to do now."

• A third explained how the training had really reinforced **the value of good PE:**

"In my local authority where I live … they've put [low traffic neighbourhoods] in and people have had no communication about it, really, and are getting very angry about it. And as much as I agree with them being in place, I'm definitely looking at that, like gosh, they really could have done with that [LCE] training."

4.1.1 Cascading learning

There is some evidence of the spread of LCE learning beyond CG officers trained through the programme, increasing potential impact and mitigating the effects of staff turnover. Seven CGs had shared learning with wider colleagues in their LA, although one noted that they had been asked by LCE not to share training materials.

With the permission of LCE, one LA used some of the training information to refresh their internal consultation and engagement guides, which has the potential to influence their wider consultation engagement approach.

4.2 BETTER WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Eight CGs described improved – sometimes significantly so – cross-team relationships as a result of going on the LCE training together. Such benefits included better communication, better shared understanding and a shared narrative or language. One interviewee said that cross-team trust had increased:

"My colleagues [in the Community Partnerships Team] know more where I'm coming from and why [the climate] topic is important and why I want to say this stuff, because they've been through a climate change course with me. So their climate literacy is raised. And on the other side, they know that they can trust me to go out and put me in front of their groups, their residents and their networks. Because [we] went through a course which was about how to engage people properly."

THE VALUE OF CROSS-TEAM WORKING

LCE came at a really good time for one CG as they were working on their climate strategy. They used training places strategically to build relationships with other key teams. They formed a cross-departmental working group comprising the people attending the training, who met at other times to discuss their learning. As a result, officers reported:

"We've made some really good relations within our own organisation because of the LCE programme. And now I feel like I could work with some teams that I would not think about before.

We've had a lot of support from [another team]. We probably wouldn't have got as far as we did without them. LCE allowed us to have a consistent knowledge base across a number of key teams and the shared foundation for action was invaluable."

This LA was one of the more active CGs in implementing LCE learning. Despite this, officers said in retrospect they would have taken more time to digest learning and discuss it with colleagues. They recommended that LCE take this suggestion to LAs taking part in any future iterations of the programme.

4.3 ABILITY TO ADVOCATE FOR GOOD PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

For one CG, winning a place on a 'prestigious project' like LCE was good for their credibility as a team. Two said they used LCE learning to successfully lobby for new posts internally.

One CG explained how one of the biggest benefits of taking part in LCE was that it gave credibility to what they were presenting to managers:

"I've not just pulled this approach out of thin air. It's been developed in consultation with external experts through the LCE programme. And that validates it, potentially. … It gives you that validation and almost gives your partners a reassurance that you know what you're doing."

Three CGs said LCE had given them more confidence, either in explaining PE to wider colleagues or in critically assessing their LA's own PE plans. One explained that the process of building an engagement brief gave them a structure that supported the buy-in of colleagues:

"People get frightened when you say you're going to engage people on decision-making, because they automatically think it means a blank sheet of paper for anyone to decide what the council is doing … [and] everyone coming up with ideas that they can't possibly fulfil. So the really important thing in this training for me was that, because I now understand the process of building a brief, and the inputs and the limits that you can place around decision making, I can now explain that to people around the organisation."

4.4 IMPLEMENTING LCE

Our interviews with CGs were undertaken just before the end of the programme. A few were still receiving mentoring. Given the significant barriers described by CGs to date (see section 6), more outcomes might be expected in the future.

4.4.1 Implementing LCE-informed changes

Of the 15 LAs interviewed, 11 had made some changes to their work as a result of LCE, ranging from small changes to significant ones. Four had made no changes, though we understand from LCE that one of these has since started implementing.

Where CGs hadn't yet used LCE much or at all, this was primarily because of timing, and outside the control of LCE: key climate-related decisions had already been made and so couldn't be influenced by PE; no suitable project had arisen; key staff had left or were not yet in place.

4.4.2 How CGs had implemented LCE

CGs told us of a range of ways in which they had implemented their learning from LCE (several had implemented in more than one way):

- **Climate strategy.** Three CGs said the LCE training had influenced, or was about to influence, their new climate strategies.

- **Action plans.** Three CGs had used LCE learning when developing their climate action plans. For one, the effect of LCE was significant. They reported that, primarily as a result of LCE, engagement is now at the heart of their plan:

"A key objective for delivering climate action was to gain broad support for our climate strategy across the area. Prior to the LCE programme developing the strategy would have been done with limited engagement. As the programme progressed engagement was quickly identified as a critical factor for success and it became clear would need to be a core activity in the strategies development. Engagement became the foundation for the strategies development, and the strategy document itself the icing on the cake."

• **Better collaboration.** One CG described how, as a result of LCE, they had approached one of their community collaborations in a different way:

"I think we might have gone well, 'we're the council, we're doing this boom, here's the thing'. Whereas I think the approach that we're now taking is perhaps a little bit more subtle, and less in your face, and hopefully, a bit more engaging."

• **Better communication.** Another CG explained that their two annual reports relating to climate have changed:

"They tend to be lots of graphs or numbers. But following the [LCE] training, we built in a section with case studies to tell the stories of success, and tried to unpack some of the ingredients of them, and used more images and quotes. … It just made us think a bit more laterally, about how to get that message across of the action that's been taken and what you can do to help."

• **Commissioning.** Two CGs reported that LCE had helped them commission better support for their PE work. One developed a brief during LCE training, and said that the support of the facilitators in commenting on it was really helpful:

"The LCE training was quite applied for us. We were going to commission an organisation to do the core design work for this [new] programme. So we came up during the training session with some of the engagement elements and methodologies that we've included as part of the tender. The trainers gave us templates and suggestions of what to include, and what to consider when we do engagement and co-design. I will say that it was really helpful for us. … Some of them we will be applying going forward."

• **Improved engagement or consultation methods.** Four CGs reported having used some LCE learning within their existing interactions with the public. For some, respondents considered this a 'tweaking' of existing methods. One described more significant changes to their engagement efforts, making them more engaging and inclusive as a result of LCE input.

5.
WHAT PARTICIPANTS THOUGHT OF LCE

5. WHAT PARTICIPANTS THOUGHT OF LCE

This section draws on LCE monitoring data and interviews with 47 CG and PG representatives. Feedback from participants in the PG community engagement events is in section 3.

5.1 TRAINING

The LCE training was more or less the same for the PG as the CG. The former was more tailored. We had more data from CGs on training than from PGs.

5.1.1 Overall feedback

From PGs

We interviewed officers from all five PG areas. In general, feedback on training was good. Respondents liked the interactive style and the quality of facilitation.

Limited feedback was collected by LCE from PG training participants. Where it was available, it showed a fairly high level of satisfaction. The W&S and Derbyshire sites between them collected 108 completed feedback forms across their first four sessions. Overall, respondents gave the training a score of 4.7/6, where 1 is poor and 6 is excellent.

In interview, some PGs said they learned a lot, particularly on engagement tools. Some said they didn't get a lot from the training. This may be in part because we generally interviewed more senior/experienced staff from climate/engagement teams who would be expected to learn less than more junior colleagues, or colleagues from teams not leading on climate or PE. It could also reflect a need for more tailoring of training content to the group (see below for more on this).

From CGs

Training feedback collected by LCE immediately post sessions was positive. Of 45 people, two-thirds would definitely recommend the training; a third said they probably would.

CG interviewees were all positive about the training. Many commented on the LCE team's strong facilitation skills and support during and after the sessions. One described the training as:

"Pretty slick, pretty good, pretty enjoyable … an overwhelmingly positive experience. … Very professional."

Of the 45 giving feedback at the course end, one person was not happy. They explained:

"Session 5 [on framing, values and storytelling] was useful, the rest less so. It seemed quite unstructured and aimed at delivering a single event rather than an engagement programme. … I was quite disappointed by the programme as a whole and found many sessions unmemorable."

5.1.2 Content and length of training

Feedback on course content was largely positive, particularly among CG respondents. In 45 CG feedback forms, almost all said the training covered about the right content, given the time available. Average ratings for training sessions ranged from 4.7 to 5 out of 6. Interviewees particularly valued sessions on reaching and messaging for different audiences, engagement tools and the structured approach to constructing an engagement brief.

While most respondents were happy with the length of the training, some in both the PG and CG had found it a little long. Some PG interviewees linked this to finding the content pitched a little low – although there was an understanding of the need to meet a wide range of needs.

Trying to meet the needs of a broad range of people

While one CG commented that the training was tailored well to a wide range of participants, another felt that, by trying to meet the needs of a broad group of job roles and council tiers, it was 'sometimes less helpful than it could have been'.

Four noted that aspects of the course were less relevant for them. For three, this was because many of their participants were climate or PE specialists, so there was inevitably some content that was too 'bread and butter' for them.

Five CGs said some content was too sophisticated, detailed or theoretical. One did not think that their council would be able to replicate the proposed approach to tailoring messages.

5.1.3 Resources

Three CG interviewees really liked the template for planning an engagement activity. Suggestions for additional or different resources included:

- For the CG, a single workbook sent before sessions, rather than different resources.

- For the PG, a summary of the content to help as an aide memoire (we understand that at least in one site this did happen).

- For both, 'warts-and-all' case examples of what other LAs have achieved.

5.1.4 Online/offline

Train strikes, the Covid-19 pandemic and the geographical spread of participants meant some LCE training was online. On the whole, evaluation respondents preferred hybrid training with online and in-person components. Programme data also shows slightly higher CG-training attendance rates at hybrid training, compared to those who had exclusively online training. However, there was also interest in wholly in-person and wholly online training options.

In-person training may be more important for some early-career staff. However, one PG noted that online options were helpful for less confident members of staff:

"We had people who said they felt more comfortable being able to engage online, because they could just type it in the chat. And they felt a bit nervous, particularly people who were maybe earlier in their career and surrounded by people who were really, really senior."

5.1.5 The importance of good preparation

LCE spent considerable time preparing for the training and trying to meet LA needs. However, we had feedback that better preparatory work, by from both LCE and LAs, would have improved the experiences of some involved in the programme.

For the PG, LCE and LA interviewees suggested the following could have helped:

- LCE better understanding and baselining the needs of those coming to training, and planning training content around these. LAs better communicating their needs.

- LCE and LAs ensuring those attending training understood why they were part of the programme and what commitment was required. LAs ensuring they choose participants able to give the necessary time and to add and take most value from the sessions.

- LCE and LAs ensuring there is clarity around the type of projects that are in scope.

- LAs working to engage and get buy-in from teams and senior leaders. LAs helping attending officers to get up to speed on the basics of PE or climate where necessary.

- LAs having a plan in place to use LCE resources and to reflect and plan between and after training sessions.

Similarly, six CGs said more briefing in advance of the training would be helpful. With this, they could better identify appropriate participants and projects, and prepare participants for the training. CGs felt that preparatory work would give LCE a better understanding of participant needs, helping LCE to tailor training, including condensing it where possible.

5.2 CG PROGRAMME FEEDBACK

5.2.1 CG peer learning

CGs were offered three online peer support sessions post training; there were also opportunities for peer learning through the training. The peer learning sessions were found fairly helpful and, more generally, most CGs interviewed had really appreciated having contact with other LAs. They got ideas and 'inspiration' and found it reassuring when others were having similar difficulties to them. Networking was more likely at in-person events.

Several CGs noted that while they already had contact with other nearby LAs, meeting officers through LCE from further away, with whom they wouldn't normally have contact, was helpful. A few went on to have contact with each other outside the course; one reported having established a regular meeting with another participant.

Some CG interviewees found the peer support sessions less helpful for a range of reasons. For example: they had little yet to share themselves; they were sharing their own learning rather than hearing from others; the sessions were sometimes focused to much on challenges rather than solutions; it wasn't always easy to share experiences honestly.

5.2.2 CG mentoring

At the time of interview, few of the CG LAs interviewed had taken advantage of the mentoring (details on uptake by programme end are in 2.2.2), usually because they did not have a project to work on or had insufficient capacity to engage. Realising the window for using mentoring was too small for some LAs, LCE extended the timeframe. One CG reported that without this they wouldn't have been able to use the offer:

> *"Flexibility is key for local authorities. … Most climate change teams across the country are probably small, under resourced, and we get pulled on to other things that are suddenly seen as a priority and we have to deal with them."*

Those interviewees who had used mentoring found it useful. Two said it was the most impactful part of LCE, although they added it was necessary to have the training first.

5.2.3 Engaging senior leaders

LCE staff were aware from the outset that CGs might want help to engage senior staff and elected leaders. Due to a lack of budget, LCE tested self-guided resources for these colleagues. The approach was unsuccessful in this case. Uptake appears to have been low (see 2.2). Almost half of CG interviewees had not shared the resources because of problems with timing and content, as well as insufficient capacity among senior colleagues to engage with them.

In future, CGs thought it would be useful to be able to track resource uptake and to have further support to engage senior colleagues. Some suggested support to engage senior stakeholders could be part of the CG training.
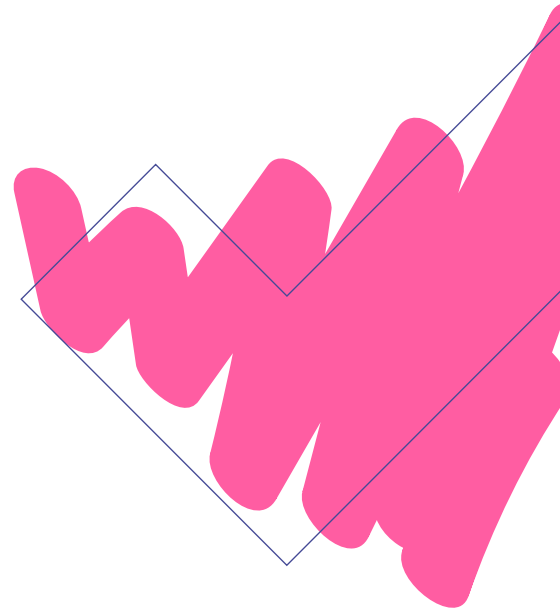
5.3 PG PROGRAMME FEEDBACK

In this section we share findings from interviews with officers from the PGs and local councils, and community members who were involved in organising events. The collaborative approach to the work means it is not always clear who was responsible for some aspects of it – and therefore not clear which stakeholders some feedback relates to.

5.3.1 Overall

After training, PGs had access to up to £45K of LCE staff support. PG interviewees were generally positive about the LCE support, although there was a range in view. Some felt the support was 'excellent, couldn't fault it'; others described it as 'overall, a really positive experience'. Others had more reservations, described below.

That LCE could draw on a range of specialists, for example in communications or Polis, was really appreciated. Some noted that working with an external consultant helped motivate change. There was particular praise for some LCE staff for their support throughout the process:

> *"[Our LCE lead has] been brilliant. [They] seem to get the logic in terms of the environment that we're working in. The experience that [they] bring from other places that [they] have worked in has been encouraging. [They] have been challenging where [they've] needed to be. It has been excellent, absolutely excellent."*

Facilitation skills

There was praise for LCE's on-the-day event facilitation:

> *"Had it been left more to us to actually run the events without [LCE's] input, I don't know that they would have been quite as energetic. Their facilitators were excellent, … there was a real buzz in the room."*

5.3.2 Length and nature of the PG process

As with any pilot programme, much was learned about effective delivery – particularly with the PG, who accessed more of the intervention. PG participants usefully told us about a range of potential areas for improvement.

Work timings

The LCE project was delayed in all PG sites for a range of reasons: issues within LCE; issues within PG LAs; external context. Some of these are discussed in more detail in section 6 below. One respondent noted that future programmes need to be more realistic in their time planning.

One senior officer thought the delay in their area had been beneficial because it takes time for people to slot new work into their jobs, and new approaches might become more embedded as a result: 'It's steadied it and given it the space to find its feet, I think.'

For others, delays were a source of frustration. One of the community organisers working with LCE explained that delays had almost lost the commitment of the community group they are part of. They added that while the £750 grant to the Essex local councils was an 'inspiration', lack of clarity as to when that might be offered, alongside the unknown length of time waiting for the post-event report, might damage momentum.

Involvement and participation

In some cases – perhaps due to the compressed timescales of some of the PE activities – participants wanted to be more involved in engagement processes. One respondent would have welcomed more local input from LCE in choosing themes for public consultation at the W&S Marston Sicca pop-ups. Some council officers reported wanting more involvement in the design of PE events.

Conversely, a community organiser in one PG felt that the county LA didn't fully understand the limited resources available to town or parish councils and expected too much from them in organising activities.

W&S steering group

Some respondents felt the W&S steering group had been helpful to keep the stakeholders on schedule. Others felt the group was too big and unwieldy – at its inception in September 2022 it comprised 19 people. Some felt it met too frequently, made insufficient progress and generated too many administrative tasks. This had a very negative effect on at least one participant's enthusiasm.

Subgroups were formed to work with LCE on the design and delivery of the events. These worked better, and LCE support to chair meetings and brief members on engagement activities was described by one respondent as helpful.

5.3.3 Shared understanding

Occasionally, lack of shared understanding between LCE and LAs was a problem:

- **Understanding PE.** Despite training, some participants struggled to distinguish one-way climate communications from more collaborative engagement approaches.

- Some officers in one PG felt there might have been more **clarity on the LCE offer and roles.** In another, both the LA and LCE acknowledged a lack of understanding as to what final project reports might look like. Although we understand the Memorandum of Understanding signed by PGs at sign-up to LCE explained who was responsible for PE expenses, one PG respondent wasn't aware of this, and the expenses were a surprise.

- **Lack of agreement about honorariums.** LCE is used to paying for honorariums to people involved in engagement exercises; some PGs felt this was not possible within the context of the financial crisis. This caused some tensions and concerns about uptake of events.

Some of these issues also caused problems at the local level. One community organiser commented: 'I think we over promised to people [in our community]. … If we did this again, we'd need more clarity on responsibility, expectations and end product.'

LCE staff reflected that choosing PG sites might be done differently in future. Applicants were interviewed in groups, in which individuals had a mixed understanding of what LCE was trying to achieve which made it hard to assess overall likely capacity for the LCE programme.

5.3.4 Communication

Communication in general

There was some feedback that communication from LCE could have been improved. Officers in one PG felt they didn't always know what was going on. They reported that promised event videos did not arrive, which 'really hurt our comms'.

Before PE events

Some PG respondents noted a lack of timely information before PE events, sometimes from LCE, sometimes from the LAs. This had an effect on:

- **Recruitment of local councils.** Officers found it hard to 'sell' participation in the pilot to prospective local councils.

- **Recruitment of participants for the events.** One LA commented that LCE was late providing details of the event design which meant that officers weren't able to start marketing early enough. It was also harder to recruit community members to something they felt they did not know the full details of.

- **The confidence of co-organisers.** Although positive about how the events went, some were concerned beforehand as they didn't know what the events would look like.

6.
LEARNING FROM LCE

6. LEARNING FROM LCE

This section describes the factors affecting what LCE could achieve.

6.1 THE NATURE OF THE LCE PROGRAMME

6.1.1 What success looks like

It may have been helpful to have a clearer idea of what success looked like for LCE, the potential journey of change for participants, and might realistically be achieved within the timeframe given the nature of the intervention and the context it was working in.

At a learning event for consortium members in July 2023, LCE staff reflected on programme achievements. They wondered if some of their ambitions for the programme had been set too high, or at least within a timescale that was unrealistic for change in large organisations. Conversely, it was noted that on the basis of a small amount of LCE input (three days of training, peer support and up to a day of mentoring), a few CGs described some perhaps unexpectedly significant outcomes (see section 4).

Achieving smaller steps over a longer timescale may be more likely for many LAs. Some PG areas felt that, while the LAs' PE had been improved, it hadn't got as far along the continuum of involvement as LCE had hoped. However, in one of these sites, while the PG lead agreed, they also felt that significant steps forward had been made, that LCE may be the start of a longer change process. One CG also felt LCE might usefully focus more on the little steps LAs could take to improve their PE:

> *"What are the little things we could do that would make a difference? … Things we could incorporate into our day-to-day work. … What is it we can do as professionals in our day-to-day jobs?"*

A theory of change for the programme may have been helpful, outlining a clear process of change LAs might go through, showing steps along the way. This might have helped LCE better identify LA starting points, and potentially to tailor their support to PGs even more. It might also have enabled them to better judge success: for some of the LAs involved, early changes, while seemingly small to LCE staff, may be significant over time.

6.1.2 Applying learning – having real projects to work on

For those LAs who had a real project to work on, the outcomes were better, both in terms of implementation (as LCE expected) but also in learning and improved working relationships.

The majority of CGs worked on a live project, and this was found to be useful. Not having a real project meant for some the training felt a little long, or they struggled to maintain motivation:

> *"The extended sessions were probably most relevant if you had a 'decision' that was being realised. For some of us, we didn't have completely relevant 'decisions' to bring in and so didn't really get as much from the in-depth planning of public engagement around it. It could be worth making it clear before all of the sessions and before choosing which staff were attending that we would need to base it around a 'decision'. Or alternatively, to make the sessions less focused on the specific example and streamline them in length."*

Two CG interviewees suggested that a shared hypothetical scenario might be useful for future training, partly for people who may not have a live project, and partly to give opportunity for cross LA working.

PGs were recruited to LCE on the basis they had a live project to work on. In reality, the projects mooted were sometimes not very clear or circumstances changed between application and implementation. As a result, some had to decide on new projects during or after training.

One PG felt that greater clarity up front as to the purpose of the LCE work, what decision it was going to influence, what team was to be responsible and where the budget would come from would have really helped:

> *"Because those really specific questions weren't answered at key points in the programme, what we have is kind of a fluffy ball of mess, which we're going to [have to] focus down on after the completion of the project. If that had been done last year, … it would have been a lot more effective. … If I was to do [LCE], again, I would ask [LCE] to hold us a lot more accountable thorughout the process. In that we define what the end goal is from the start and build it around that."*

6.1.3 The order of the LCE offer

Should all LAs receive the training first, and then recruit to the PG?

Having training first would be helpful as some LAs will only know at the last minute whether they have a feasible live project to work on and the capacity to drive it; it could also be something they are encouraged to get in place during the training. Having gone through the training, they would also be better placed to know what counts as true engagement. However, it might also mean that more LAs did not have a live project to work on through the training.

LCE staff thought the idea of recruiting to the PG after training had potential, but noted that there was a risk that LAs would feel in competition with each other during the training, for the resources at the end. This might reduce honesty and networking.

Should training always come before mentoring?

Some CGs felt that training was essential to make the most of the mentoring; another suggested training alongside mentoring would have helped them implement sooner. An LCE staff member noted that PGs found it easier to do PE events with a basic training in place.

6.1.4 The benefits of 'immersion'

Several stakeholders – LCE staff, CG and PG officers – wondered whether it was important to have more 'immersion', more hands-on experience of doing PE. LCE staff felt that seeing good PE in person would be motivating. This was the aim of the PG strand, but by having all the training up front and a long gap before the engagement activities, some participants may have been lost along the way, either to staff turnover, or because they would have responded better to practice before (or at least alongside) theory. In future, LCE staff reflected that they might try to work more immersion in the practice of PE earlier into any capacity building programme.

There is a discussion to be had about the necessity – or not – of getting the theory and principles in place before doing PE. Is it more important to get the groundwork in place first, or to just have a go and make mistakes, as a motivating first step and a focus for later reflection and learning? In the same way, some respondents felt they needed to get internal culture change and buy-in before they could really do good PE. But that would require a big leap of faith for resource-strapped LAs; maybe an immersive experience, even if flawed, might provide the motivation to change?
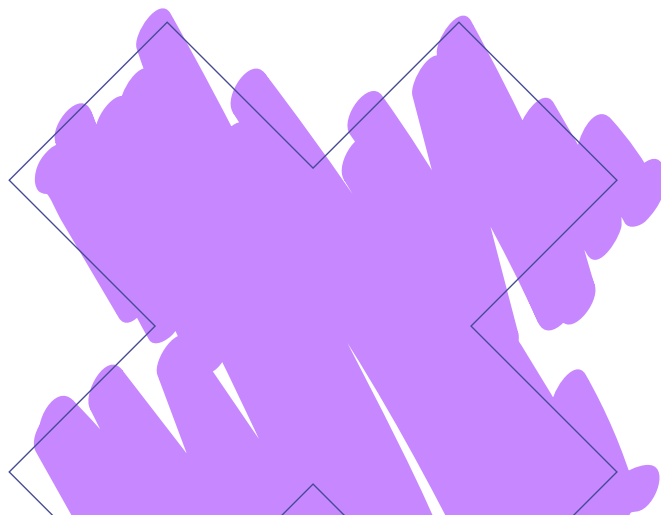
6.1.5 Local versus county

LCE took the decision to focus on all tiers of LA. Some stakeholders noted the potential for working more with town and parish councils – because there is 'not a massive machine to move', and because PE may be easier when focused on residents' immediate environs.

Some respondents in one PG felt that the co-design suggestions of LCE were more suitable for local, place-based consultation, and less suitable for a countywide approach. They felt that county is too disparate, for example in terms of demographics and geography, to be able to meaningfully co-design a full project. One also felt this was about people's identification – or not – with a whole county:

> *"I also think there is an element of relatability, how many people consider themselves [from that county] and would engage with something countywide potentially over a long time."*

There is evidence of appetite from local councils to engage their residents around climate:

- Our interviewee from WALC had recently been contacted by at least ten of their [local council] members for support, after they had heard about LCE.

- W&S held an online showcase event to share learning from their pilots which was attended by 34 rural town and parish clerks and councillors.

- Interviewees from two local councils reported interest from other councils about this.

One clerk argued that local councils lack knowledge and confidence to engage residents around climate actions and could benefit from access to resources and contacts in larger councils, as well as from efforts to coordinate smaller councils' activities. The clerk suggested support for pilot councils to implement common climate actions (e.g. aspects of recycling, no mow and LED street lighting) could usefully generate good examples for other councils to learn from.

Any focus on town or parish councils would need to take into account their limited capacity.

6.1.6 Which CGs did LCE work best for?

Numbers are too small to draw firm conclusions about which CG LAs this programme worked better for, so this section should be read with caution. However, a few things can be said:

- There was no obvious pattern as to who this worked more for in terms of political administration, tier, English region or rurality.

- Those implementing more changes were generally larger authorities. Almost all had real current projects to work on through the training.

- For the four who didn't implement, all lacked people to take the work forward, either because key staff had left, or because those remaining were not able to lead the work. For two, lack of an obvious project to work on was also an issue.

Engagement with the LCE programme was not a clear predictor of success:

- Two of the four non-implementers engaged less well with the programme in terms of training attendance than other CGs. However, an LA that engaged really well did not implement, and some who didn't engage so well did go on to implement.

- Having mentoring does not appear to be associated with better reported outcomes, although this is of course based on tiny numbers. Some of those reporting no progress had had mentoring; some of those reporting quite a lot of progress had none.

- This lack of association doesn't mean the programme was not good quality. Given the positive feedback for LCE, and reported outcomes in terms of learning, it suggests that those who were going to implement were going to do it anyway, but mentoring and training may have improved the quality of implementation. It would also be unrealistic to expect a few hours of mentoring to unstick systemic barriers, for example.
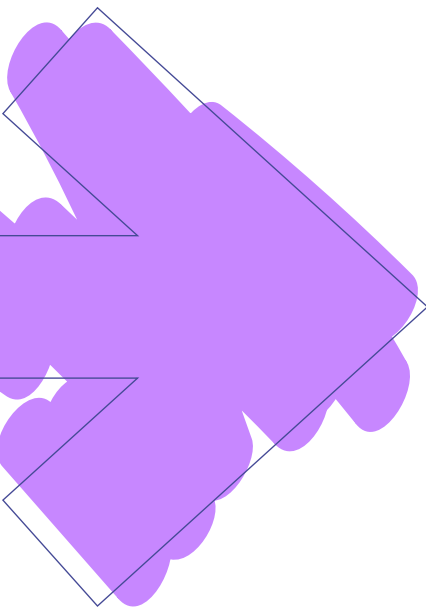
6.2 THE LCE APPROACH TO CAPACITY BUILDING

Feedback from LAs involved in LCE make it clear they benefitted – often significantly – from LCE skills in, and approach to, capacity building. However, some aspects were raised for discussion.

6.2.1 What counts as good PE

All PGs had to have a real project to work on; this was ideal for CGs but not essential. In some cases, mooted projects were not considered appropriate by LCE if they didn't contain sufficient scope for the public to affect climate decision-making – this was at the core of LCE.

One PG explained that their LCE project was delayed because LCE felt their proposed project was not suitable for the programme. Separately, another CG felt that LCE had been a 'bit dogmatic' in their interpretation of good PE, when rejecting their proposed project for the training. While the CG did understand LCE's reservations, they felt the project still had potential. The CG noted that since then they had 'got a bit stuck'.

This may link to an occasional lack of shared understanding of LCE (see Section 5.3.3). One respondent said that in retrospect they hadn't fully understood the purpose of LCE at the bidding stage. Some CG interviewees had the impression that only larger scale, formal engagement exercises with written briefs counted as doing 'proper' LCE-style PE, which was not the intention of the programme.

6.2.2 Facilitative teaching style

LCE staff have usually taken a facilitative, empowering approach to their support of LAs though LCE. This reflects their ethos and the aims of the programme and their respective organisations.

Some LCE participants would have welcomed a different approach. One CG felt strongly they wanted more trainer input and less sharing of experiences, especially as not all CGs had relevant experience to share. Two wanted more support within the training in applying learning to their own work, or more critique of their work. One explained:

"We didn't have time enough to dig into our own specific circumstances. … I would have welcomed the trainers hearing more about the real challenges that we have, and giving more guidance to say, 'okay, then in your case, maybe you should focus on this type of method'."

A few PG respondents wanted more input within LCE workshops to help people learn or move on from sticking points. In one PG, a community event co-organiser felt frustrated that they were briefed by LCE not to intervene if one of the event groups they were chairing got stuck; they felt that a small intervention may have made the groupwork much more effective.

Two respondents, from different PGs, felt strongly that they had received insufficient input to shape their work and that the LCE balance between input and an empowering approach had been wrong for them. One described it as 'less training, more facilitated challenge sessions':

"I wasn't necessarily given new skills. … It was very much them saying 'over to you'. … I would rather be just told this is the thing that you should do. I appreciate with this kind of thing you have to think in a different way. But maybe explain that at the start: 'This is the approach that we're going to take'. … I just felt as though they lost a few of us."

The other PG respondent was expecting more input and direction:

"[LCE] are very experienced at public engagement events, and facilitation and all of these sorts of things. And we are not. I felt that we weren't always benefiting from the experience that [LCE] had. … To some extent, we shouldn't need to make the same mistakes as other people undoubtedly have in the past. … We probably could have been told several of these things wouldn't have worked at the start, because they've done it before."

A third respondent liked the empowering approach, but explained that it was sometimes tricky when they had so little experience to draw on:

"So I thought that was something that was really effective, trying to empower us, and what we want to get from the event. … [However,] even though it was really nice to be asked, 'what do you want? What's your input for this?', it was all very new to us and I didn't have a great deal of understanding about how things might work. So maybe just a bit more prep around that and guidance."

6.3 CONTEXT

6.3.1 Wider context

A number of aspects of the wider context affected the LCE programme:

- **Demsoc, one of the consortium members, closed part way through the programme,** at short notice. The remaining members of the consortium worked hard to try and minimise the effect on the PGs being supported by Demsoc. Fortunately a Demsoc staff member leading on LCE became an associate of Involve, which provided welcome continuity. Despite this, there was a hiatus at some PG sites, which reduced some positive impact of LCE.

- The 2023 **elections and pre-election period** affected the PGs' work and added delays.

- The **cost of living crisis** brought both benefits and difficulties to PG work. Some areas found it a useful 'hook' for promoting aspects of behaviour change, like reduced energy consumption. At the same time, this meant the PE undertaken in these cases sometimes leaned more towards informing than engagement in decision-making.

6.3.2 The local authority context

Some aspects of the LA context have limited the achievements of the LCE programme.

Capacity and resources

Unsurprisingly, most LAs said that lack of resources or capacity had been a barrier in implementing their learning. Many described being overloaded with other work.

Lack of funding for PE was a barrier for several LAs, although some partly overcame this thanks to good relationships with LA colleagues and by tacking climate engagement onto other budgets and projects.

Lack of LA funding in general may also be a barrier to PE; LAs may simply lack the funding to implement PE findings. In the climate context, for example, they may have insufficient funds to make infrastructure changes or fund greener alternatives like retrofit.

LCE staff noted that it is important that LAs factor costs of PE into their funding bids. In an LCE peer support session, CGs gave some suggestions to make the most of limited resources, including 'piggybacking' on to other council projects or consultations, and working through voluntary sector partners. However, it was noted that such opportunistic tactics might lack strategy and coherence.

Cross-council working

LA work on tackling climate change cannot be done only at a small, local level – it necessarily requires cross-area working. An officer in one PG explained that through LCE, they had realised the potential of achieving some of their climate ambitions by working with other local councils.

Focusing on cross-county issues brings difficulties working across different tiers of councils. One city council noted that as they were not responsible for travel in their county, they couldn't push forward changes in those areas – they needed to work through another LA.

Several respondents reported that, because of this issue, it was vital when doing PE to manage expectations of residents – being very clear about what's in and out of scope, and what is within the remit of each council.

6.4 PEOPLE AND CULTURE

6.4.1 Who to involve

Mixed groups

All LAs involved in LCE recruited mixed teams (including policy, engagement, communications and other staff) to the programme, as advised by LCE. This was helpful because climate and PE are often cross-cutting and fall into many teams' roles. Mixed team working brought about significant outcomes in terms of improved working relationships.

LCE staff reflected that they might refine their guidance a little. When there is a live project to work on, involving colleagues from communications and procurement might be useful; otherwise their involvement might feel too early.

When involving mixed groups, stakeholders said it was important to get the basics in place before the training started:

- For internal council teams, that might mean training on climate for PE specialists or vice versa.
- Where community members are included, a basic briefing in LA terminology and structures, and the roles and responsibilities of different council tiers, could be useful.

Managing cross-cutting projects

Climate and PE can cut across multiple teams within councils. In one PG, the LCE project was led by climate officers, but the projects were carried out by teams over whom they had no managerial control or budget oversight. While progress in this PG was supported by good working relationships and shared commitment to policy goals around carbon neutrality, it highlights the need to put in place clear decision-making and governance arrangements for PE projects to succeed.

Senior participants

Stakeholders had a difficult balance to strike in terms of who to involve in LCE training. Senior invitees – including elected members – would bring status and decision-making power to the project. But their presence might make more junior officers less able to be honest. However, in post-training interviews, no one regretted inviting senior people, and a few respondents from CGs and PGs wished more had attended.

The role of technical specialists

The PGs all had some technical specialists involved in their LCE work. One explained that this was vital – there was no point consulting the public if their suggestions could not be enacted because they were technically impossible. However, LCE staff noted[2] that some technical leads had been reluctant to do as much engagement as anticipated, perhaps because of concerns that it might slow projects down, duplicate statutorily-required consultations or reduce technical quality. LCE staff reflected that, at times, this reluctance may have led to tensions in some PGs.

6.4.2 The importance of individuals

Champions

One PG described the importance of 'champions' within one of their LCE projects, a project felt to have made significant changes as a result of LCE. An officer explained that there had been a couple of people from that work area who'd really championed it, and who were able to challenge the status quo.

Staff turnover

Particular individuals have been an important part of the success of aspects of LCE. Projects often need someone with knowledge and passion to drive them and if that person leaves it isn't always easy to continue as strongly. Staffing issues within LCE and at some of the PGs are likely to have affected what some PGs were able to achieve. This is a recurrent theme in many of this author's long-term evaluations of other programmes.

[2] LCE interim report to Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, April 2023

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6.4.3 Senior support

The importance of senior staff support

It is unsurprising that LCE projects with strong senior support found this very helpful; senior staff brought 'authority and gravitas'. In one PG, the council chief executive attended training, both to demonstrate their commitment but also for personal learning about new engagement techniques. An officer at the PG described this endorsement as 'unbelievably useful'.

A very senior officer in another PG also attended training and had some involvement in the LCE project throughout; they reported doing so to lead by example and to hear of any concerns, so they could help keep the project on track.

> *"If you're in the room, even if you do need to keep an eye on emails, or take an urgent call, you can read what's going on. And you can sow seeds, or you can ask a bit of a challenging question that maybe the others either don't have the overview to know to ask or wouldn't feel comfortable doing in terms of challenging other people's areas."*

Seven of the 15 CGs interviewed mentioned difficulties in persuading colleagues to back their PE efforts. They encountered resistance from colleagues who thought PE was too resource intensive, too radical, or too risky. Others mentioned colleagues who did not understand good PE. As one might expect, in councils with strong leadership support – or indeed where more senior staff had been part of the LCE programme – these barriers were not reported.

Elected members

Some of the LAs involved in the PG had cabinet members leading on climate change whose endorsement was also helpful. One PG officer felt that LCE's session for senior leaders was successful but that, as a one-off, it was insufficient. In retrospect, they felt they should have engaged them more, earlier on:

> *"I'd advise another council to think it through to the end of the project (not just engagement) and think about political perspective. If you don't have the political support there's no point doing it."*

LCE staff shared the following learning about the sessions they had run within PGs that included elected members:

- **In-person training worked much better** than online.

- **Good preparation helped.** With PG officers, it was useful to discuss what would work in their context. They also found it helpful to work with co-facilitators to anticipate tricky questions that might come up, for example, 'isn't this what we already do?' and 'won't this slow down consultation?'

- **How officers frame the session to participants is important.** Councillors should be briefed in advance on what to expect, including on training format. Calling a session a 'briefing' didn't work well when trying to explain a different way of engaging people.

- **Allow time for Q&A with councillors** in advance to increase engagement and tailor content.

Councillors feeding back on one of the sessions, within LCE's own survey, would have appreciated an opportunity to be more involved with choosing the PG's project theme.

Getting buy-in

The chief executive who attended LCE training had the following advice to more junior staff wanting to get senior buy-in:

- Elected members need to see climate change and/or PE as a key priority for their area.

- The corporate plan should set climate change and/or PE as one of the priorities.

- The CE and leadership team need to set an example of climate change and/or PE as a priority.

One CG in an LCE peer support group explained how they had given all their senior leadership carbon literacy training. For one this was apparently transformative – one leader who started critical 'woke up to it'.

Demonstrating the business case

A stronger business case for the role of good PE might be helpful. A PG chief executive made a clear case for better PE to:

• **Bring the public with them on a necessary journey of change:**

"Because we're in a period of change, we're in a pressured environment in terms of demand in terms of resources. We have to change how we deliver services. … Part of the solution is if people still want those services, we believe that by pulling together community wealth, there could well be different ways of delivering services. …. But in order to have that conversation, … you've got to engage in a very different way. … How do we work together to address the [issues]?"

• **Potentially save money on mistakes:**

"There's possibly an argument that says that you're looking at the business case, if you engage badly, then the rear-guard action is very, very expensive as well. … Either complaints, or abortive costs and things like that, where you're embarking on something, and you engage badly, and then it doesn't happen, you'll have sunk a whole lot of money into it."

• **Change behaviour:**

"How do we move towards our intended outcomes of net zero carbon? In order to do that, you've got to get a huge amount of public engagement. We're a relatively big council, we get to net zero carbon ourselves, there's still 99.6% of CO2 emissions being produced by by businesses, homes, transport and therefore all of us. So how do we work to get everyone engaged in this?"

7.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMES

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMES

These recommendations are based both on what LCE implemented successfully from the start, and on what they learned through the programme. These recommendations are for support organisations or teams working in PE and/or with LAs in future. We call the organisations they work with 'clients', although this might not be a paid relationship.

7.1 A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Skills and capacity building programmes – particularly with complex organisations in complex contexts – benefit from a theory of change for how change is intended to happen in LAs. This can help support organisation and client identify where the client is along the journey of change, and where they hope to be. There may also be other goals like making systemic changes, or creating exemplars of good practice.

The nature of the support offer can then be shaped by the:

- levels of **resource** available for support (in LCE, this was CG- or PG-levels of support)

- **intended outcomes and impacts** of the support

- anticipated **timescale** of changes and the wider **context** for the intervention.

A theory of change would also:

- provide a framework for support organisations and any evaluators to judge programme success, including intermediate outcomes

- help support organisations and potential clients decide if a programme is appropriate for the client and their situation

- provide a reference point for all support organisation staff to return to over time, and to induct new staff, to ensure support consistency and a focus on shared goals.
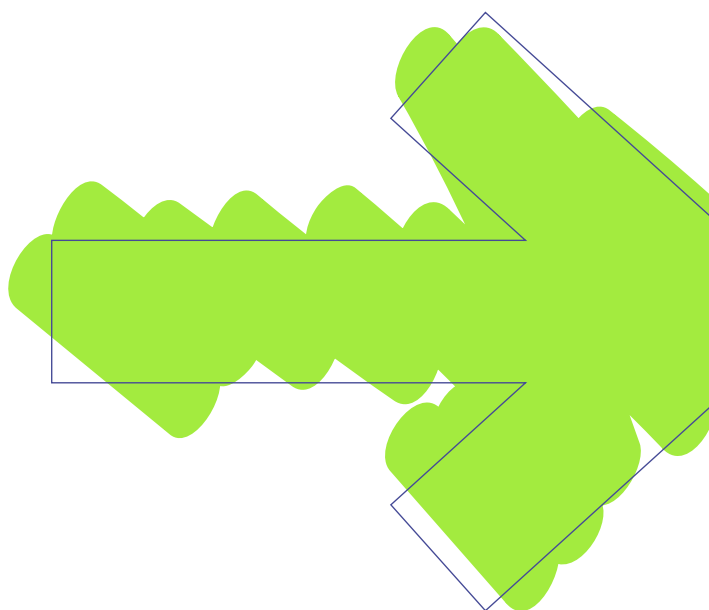
7.2 WHO WILL MAKE THE BEST USE OF SUPPORT?

It is an ongoing challenge for all support organisations to prioritise support and to try to anticipate and minimise the barriers their clients may encounter.

A consideration of the minimum that needs to be in place before a support organisation can work with a client is helpful, and support organisations may need to be able to say no to some projects. Such minimum criteria should be used consciously as they run the risk of excluding clients with whom some beneficial changes might still be made.

LCE worked hard to seek and then screen applications from LAs against their criteria. In many cases this worked well, in others less so. Recruitment against such criteria needs to be able to ascertain whether criteria are genuinely met. Allowing LAs to be honest about their starting points and allocating support based on that assessment may help.

Criteria will vary depending on the intended outcomes of the work and the nature of the support offer. Intensive support, as LCE provided for the PG, will have a higher bar of minimum criteria than light-touch support as provided for the CG. Based on the LCE experience, intensive support is more likely to result in successful outcomes if the client has the following in place:

1. Focus for change. When building capacity in PE, the client must have clear decision that needs to be made, which public views can influence. The public should not be engaged if their input is not to be used.

2. Timing. Is the timing right? A project to which learning could be immediately applied was one of the biggest predictors of success in LCE.

3. Context. What is the context in which the project will take place? Will internal or external factors mean implementation and embedding learning is very difficult?

4. Buy-in. Senior staff can model good practice and demonstrate support of the project.

5. A driver. Someone with capacity, skill and passion to drive the process was key to success in LCE. Contingency plans for if they move on would help manage turnover.

6. A sponsor. Someone senior, closely involved in the project, can help troubleshoot barriers and drive implementation of any subsequent changes. In LCE, some LA climate teams were new. Staff were dynamic and able but sometimes lacked the authority, or the credibility that comes with longevity within an organisation, to effect change.

7. A long view. Plans from the start to embed and implement learning will improve outcomes. The cascading of knowledge internally can amplify the impact of support.

8. Capacity. Sufficient capacity will be needed across all the relevant team members for the entire process, including time outside of formal support to reflect, learn and plan.

9. Budget. Sufficient budget is needed for the support process and for implementation. Some LAs LCE worked with even struggled to pay for refreshments in PE activities.

10. Values. Aligned values with the support organisation will be helpful, for example: around when the public will be engaged or not; the paying of honorariums for people's time.

For some of these, for example budget for implementation, it may be sufficient for the client to have a willingness to work towards the criteria.

7.3 GROUNDWORK

7.3.1 Scoping needs

An initial session with clients is useful to explain the work and to ensure all stakeholders understand the aims and scope of the work. An early scoping session can also help:

- clarify respective roles, responsibilities and expectations

- identify who might best be engaged in the process and how

- identify the learning styles and preferences of those involved.

Even with the best preparation, it may not initially be clear to support organisations or their clients what is needed. Also, the viability of projects like PE can change rapidly. It could help to build in an initial scoping phase after which plans can be reviewed and amended if needed.

7.3.2 Getting buy-in, maintaining engagement

Getting buy-in

Successful projects have buy-in from the right people. Clients may need help to identify who has the power to influence good PE, and then how to influence them. Working back from the problem they are trying to solve, and then identifying key people, can be helpful. A strong business case for good PE would be help get senior buy-in.

The role of technical experts

Technical experts play a vital role in many PE projects, and there is no point consulting the public if their subsequent recommendations are technically unviable. However, LCE found that focusing on the technical requirements of a project, particularly in the design stages for PE, could narrow the scope for involving the public. Carefully setting out the scope for both technical input and PE allows stakeholders to understand the different approaches needed for each. Playing to stakeholder strengths is important.

Cross-cutting themes

Many capacity building projects cut across teams and indeed organisations. Crossing departments and budgets requires careful thought about governance and requires high levels of collaboration. Solutions, and who is responsible for them, may not be simple or clear.

Support for advocacy

Work on organisational change can be contentious. Giving staff the confidence to advocate within their organisations can be important, perhaps particularly in PE and climate action. Good examples of where successful climate action has been taken by organisations of different sizes and political persuasions help.

7.3.3 Tailoring support

- Light-touch, group-based support is cost effective, and can bring peer learning. However, those with live projects to work on will benefit more and timescales may not align across organisations. A pick and mix support offer, accessible over time, could be helpful.

- Organisations – and people within them – come with different knowledge baselines. A modular approach to training would enable people to choose what they need. Work across teams will require a nuanced approach to skill building.

- It's not always possible for people to know what they don't know, so support organisations may still need to do some diagnostic analysis of starting points.

7.3.4 Accessibility and inclusivity

LCE hoped to encourage LAs to do more inclusive and accessible PE. There was some success in this in terms of changes to the type of methods employed and where the public were engaged. However, there was no evidence that the people actually engaged were more diverse. Organisations need support to understand the importance of reaching diverse audiences, and on the relevance of monitoring diversity as a tool to help achieve this.

7.4 LEARNING FROM WORK WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- It can be tempting to assume that senior stakeholders matter most. Power might lie elsewhere; some officers struggled to get buy-in from immediate colleagues and peers.

- Some officers may need to learn how to get buy-in internally, for example identifying alignment between the aims of capacity building with current strategies.

- Upfront succession planning is needed to mitigate the effects of staff turnover.

- LCE found that time planning with LAs was a little less predictable than expected, and working within the LCE timescale was hard. Working in the political environment brings specific challenges with the effects of elections and the pre-election period. Especially when modelling a participatory process, time for contingencies will be needed.

- LCE found that the level of resource stretch in LAs around PE and climate action was extreme. Starting small in PE in climate decision-making will be a necessity for some. Cheaper ways to recruit members of the public need to be found, especially for town and parish councils.

- Despite the challenges, LCE found a real interest in learning about better PE in climate decision-making in LAs. There is potential for significant change in this area.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: LCE OUTCOMES ASSESSED BY THIS EVALUATION

Outcomes for officers and councillors participating in the LCE

- Increased knowledge/understanding about high-quality, inclusive PE (primarily in climate decision-making, but wider too):
  - what it looks like
  - the relevance of power, privilege and inclusion to PE work, and how to address this
  - how to plan it and engage people in it
  - how to deliver it, including different methods
  - how to communicate it better externally
- Increased confidence in doing good PE
- Increased motivation to do good PE
- Increased skill in doing good PE
- Increased contact with other LAs involved in PE and sharing of learning (and potentially even joint working)
- Any other outcomes, including role or job change (and whether they have taken their learning with them)

Outcomes for LAs participating in the programme

- Individual staff involved in LCE share their learning and plans and/or the toolkits with colleagues or other stakeholders (proactively, or are asked to share), and who they share it with; some individuals become champions for PE, internally and/or externally
- Increased confidence within the LA to take action on climate
- Increased commitment within the LA to more/better PE (greater buy-in, prioritisation, resourcing), primarily around climate decision-making (but potentially beyond)
- Changes to planned approach to PE, budget for or amount of PE (including doing PE where hadn't previously planned to)

Outcomes in terms of what LAs did differently

- PE commissioned by LAs is well informed/purposeful/well designed/shows have understood training is better than the average tender
- More inclusive PE processes undertaken (including: takes into account power and privilege; accessible options etc)
- More diverse groups involved in PE for climate decision-making (as a result of wider outreach and engagement)
- More and/or better quality communications around PE in climate decision-making

Impacts (changes to which LCE contributes)

Impacts within the LA and its work

- Increased enthusiasm for PE within the council
- Council staff give serious consideration to residents' suggestions
- Council policies reflect recommendations by residents made in public engagement
- Changes to decision-making or practice that were influenced by the results of PE
- LAs capture learning on their PE and its impact, including taking learning into new PE work
- LAs update residents and stakeholders and wider community about how recommendations from public engagement are being followed up, or not, with rationale

Impacts for local communities

- Local community members find PE exercises to be inclusive and accessible
- Local community members find their role in PE exercises meaningful and think they make a difference
- Local community members more willing to engage in PE exercises in future
- Local community members think this PE exercise was better than what their LA did before it had LCE support
- Local community members increase their understanding of climate change and/or solutions to it – eg how transport policy relates to it
- Local community members change their behaviour to mitigate climate change (reducing their own footprints; becoming more active in climate change) or adapt to climate change
- Local community members more positive about their LA and/or PE
- Local community members more supportive of the LA's climate action (eg take up of renewable energy schemes, heat pumps etc)

APPENDIX 2: PG DATA COLLECTION

PG AREA	DATA COLLECTED
DERBYSHIRE	• Interviews with LCE staff • Interviews with seven stakeholders from Derbyshire County Council, Derbyshire District Council and other organisations working with them on their LCE project • No community-level data collection • LCE files and monitoring data.
ESSEX	• Interviews with LCE staff • Interviews with three Essex County Council staff • Interviews with 15 community members involved in the three workshops as participants and organisers • LCE files and monitoring data.
LANCASTER	• Interviews with LCE staff • LCE monitoring data • Interviews with four Lancaster City Council staff, one of whom was also a community explorer • Interviews with two community explorers.
SUNDERLAND	• Interviews with LCE staff • Interviews with four staff from Sunderland City Council • No community-level data collection • LCE files and monitoring data (NB: some files lost when Demsoc closed).
WARWICK AND STRATFORD	• Interviews with LCE staff • Interviews with seven stakeholders involved in the programme, including two residents involved in organising community events, and representatives from Warwick District Council, Alcester Town Council, Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC) and Forum for the Future • Interviews with five participants at the event in Alcester; they were a mix of local residents, local councillors and council staff • LCE files and monitoring data.

APPENDIX 3: ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

Participating LAs

LAs taking part in the programme were in rural (7), urban (8) and mixed (6) areas. At the time of recruitment, there was a mix of tiers and political administrations:

- 9 district councils
- 7 unitary councils
- 3 county councils
- 1 combined authority
- 1 parish council.

- 9 Labour
- 8 Conservative
- 1 Liberal Democrat
- 3 no overall control.

Coaching group members

The 16 local authorities in the coaching group (CGs) were:

- Brighton and Hove City Council
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- Hebden Royd and Todmorden Town Councils
- Sheffield City Council
- South Tyneside Council
- Stevenage Borough Council
- Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
- Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- West Berkshire Council

- West Midlands Combined Authority
- Winchester City Council
- Kirklees Council
- Liverpool City Council
- Reading Borough Council
- Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
- Rochdale Borough Council

Coaching group training

CG training was in half or whole day sessions and covered:

1. Public participation in climate change decision-making: the what and the why?
2. Context, scope, purpose and internal impact.
3. Taking account of power, privilege and inclusion.
4. People – reaching participants and working with people outside the organisation.
5. Framing, values and storytelling.
6. Choosing methods and developing a brief.