



The less than 1% Club: Mapping net zero support for small businesses across England

A report by the Enterprise Research Centre for the Federation of Small Businesses

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About the ERC

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FOREWORD

England's 4.8 million small businesses and self-employed population will play a critical role in reaching net zero by 2050.

Recognising their role in combating climate change, many small businesses across the nation are taking steps to mitigate their impact on the environment – from installing basic measures such as LED lighting to becoming fully self-sufficient microgenerators.

However, reaching net zero is a complex undertaking and many small businesses often find themselves lacking cash and resources and being time poor.

Developing a comprehensive support network for small businesses is essential to tackle the challenges of reaching net zero.

Clear provision of information and advice about net zero and pathways to net zero will be important looking ahead. FSB's net zero research from 2021 highlighted several obstacles for small business owners to progress with decarbonisation efforts, with lack of finance and support listed as two recurring themes. The same research found that only nine per cent of small businesses have measured their carbon footprint, with over two-thirds (69%) acknowledging that they do not know how to do so.

We are delighted to work in partnership on this report which maps the net zero support landscape across England. To tackle the barriers, it is vital to take stock, understand what works and what doesn't, and where gaps remain in business support.

ERC's mapping exercise shows the various programmes and interventions aimed at net zero practices. Across England, 282 programmes offer over 700 interventions targeted at SMEs. However, there are concerns about the accessibility and reach of these programmes, as the number of recipients comprises less than 1% of the total SME population.

While this clearly demonstrates a recognition that support is needed, it is also the case that existing programmes are currently only reaching a small segment of the SME community. To ensure that the UK remains on track to reach net zero, all small businesses that require support need to be able to access it and see how it would have a demonstratable positive impact on their business.

This starts with the importance of tackling regional inconsistencies in the level of net zero programmes and interventions. Although some areas have a lack of support, certain regions stand out for having a high percentage of programmes relative to the number of businesses in their area. Secondly, the changing funding landscape in England, due to the end of ERDF funding, risks the consistency of support provision across regions. Finally, a better understanding of what works best for small firms will ensure that SMEs receive adequate support.

The consequences of not acting on climate change are well-documented. For the UK to reach its net zero targets, we must establish a net zero economy which will require everyone, including small businesses, to go beyond current efforts. With the right support from central and regional governments, many of the existing barriers can be overcome, creating an empowered small business community.



Richard Askew

England Policy Unit Chair

Federation of Small Businesses

RECOMMENDATIONS

While existing net zero support initiatives have made commendable strides in assisting SMEs on their sustainability path, it is evident that a yawning gap remains between the current level of engagement and the broader imperative of achieving net zero across all sectors of the economy.

To bridge this gap, it will be crucial to accelerate efforts to encourage the widespread adoption of sustainable practices so net zero becomes the norm rather than the exception. This necessitates a comprehensive and coordinated approach involving policy frameworks, financial incentives, and robust support mechanisms that empower businesses of all sizes to embrace the transition to a low-carbon future. This is all the more important given the termination of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funded programmes making this stocktake of provision timely. At the same time, this highlights the need for future research to cover the period when the replacement funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is in place.

The specific recommendations from this research are as follows:

- 1. The UK Government should simplify the English business support landscape for net zero, making it easier for businesses of different sizes to navigate, whilst maintaining the connection to local support. This could be achieved by establishing one business support brand across England, e.g., Business England.** More broadly, the Government will play a critical role in providing coordination and stewardship to bring together the many actors involved in net zero support.
- 2. Local authorities should consult with a diverse range of local businesses when designing programmes on net zero to ensure that the needs of all businesses are met and that they are able to see benefit from programmes.** Understanding specific business needs will be important to ensure that all businesses are motivated to participate in programmes and that they are able to make tangible changes to their businesses.
- 3. Local authorities should share more information about net zero support programmes with neighbouring local authorities and allow them to participate. This will ensure that regions are able to provide more comprehensive offerings to businesses.** The termination of EDRF has led to the closure of many programmes and there exists a striking variation in programmes across regions. Council collaboration should help address this, avoid duplication, and create a more level playing field across regions. The latter point is particularly important for businesses based in rural parts of the country, where programme consolidation has occurred inconsistently.

4. **Local authorities should - where possible - offer businesses a combination of an audits and grants.** Audits provide clarity over the required steps which are tailored to specific needs. For most small businesses, lengthy and uncertain return on investment, lack of capital and inability to access affordable finance are major barriers. Evidence demonstrates that grants encourage greater participation and help overcome the financial barrier many businesses face in the transition to net zero.
5. **Programmes – where possible – should aim to offer one-to-one support from an adviser who understands the challenges and constraints of running a small business.** Having one-to-one support constitutes an important component of a programme that can provide an additional level of confidence in firms to transition towards net zero. Advisors can play an important role in providing support when designing an action plan.
6. **The research supports the introduction of a “Help to Green” scheme to boost SME investment in net zero. FSB welcomed news that the Government will pilot a new audit and grant scheme which will enable small businesses to implement measures to become more energy efficient.** The Review of Net Zero endorsed Help to Green. The scheme would include an online hub of practical information on how to reduce energy usage and environmental impact and a voucher/grant scheme, with a value of up to £5,000 a time, which would make a grant contribution to investing in low emission transport solutions, sustainable manufacturing, energy efficiency or microgeneration.
7. **We recommend a separate assessment of past and current net zero initiatives to fully understand their advantages and cost-effectiveness. The evaluation should focus on the actual results achieved by these initiatives, not just their activities.** A thorough analysis will help develop better tailored programmes in the future and allow local authorities to adjust to the changing business landscape. This analysis should be accompanied by an impact statement that outlines the achievements of programmes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aims and objectives

The aim of this report is to provide a detailed map of the breadth and depth of net zero business support available for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in England to enable them to achieve the UK Government target of reaching net zero by 2050.

The focus of the project has been on schemes, initiatives, and organisations offering **specific or targeted initiatives** to support small firms' net zero transition. General business development and growth programmes have been excluded from data collection.

The objectives of the project were to:

1. Compile a **comprehensive directory of net zero support providers** and initiatives for small firms in each local authority area in England.
2. Use this baseline data to **identify a typology of emerging forms of business support** and their geographical coverage, and to **identify gaps or limitations in coverage**.
3. **Identify examples of good practice** within each element of the typology and provide a brief overview of the intervention alongside the directory information.
4. **Develop actionable recommendations** for government that can help more effectively support the net zero transition in smaller firms.

The report was commissioned by the [Federation of Small Businesses \(FSB\)](#), a membership organisation offering a wide range of vital business services to SMEs, including advice, financial expertise, support, and a powerful voice heard in government.

Overview of initiatives

The research identified a total of 282 programmes offering 719 interventions, encompassing various types of support, such as grants, audits, mentoring, and more. The programmes aimed to address the environmental impact of SMEs, recognising their collective contribution to carbon emissions and the need for more sustainable practices.

The research also examined the number of VAT- and/or PAYE-based businesses in different regions of the UK from 2020 to 2022. The significant number of SMEs underscores their collective impact on climate change and the importance of supporting them in adopting sustainable measures.

In terms of the typology and prevalence of intervention types, online tools, grants, audits, events, training, and one-on-one advice were among the most common forms of support found.

The funding landscape for the interventions primarily relies on statutory sources, with local authorities and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) playing significant roles.

However, precise investment levels remain elusive. While ERDF funds have contributed significantly, a substantial portion of this funding has concluded, and the future availability of funds, including from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, may impact the continuation of programmes.

Local authorities emerge as the primary providers of net zero support, often collaborating with other entities. The diverse range of provider types reflects the collaborative efforts and partnerships formed to deliver comprehensive support to SMEs.

Programmes and interventions were designed to be inclusive and open to all SMEs, with a focus on providing tailored support to address sector-specific challenges. The research showed a need for more transparency and accountability through evidence of impact and case studies.

Coverage of initiatives

While comprehensive programmes exist in all regions, there are concerns about the accessibility and reach of these programmes, as the research showed the number of recipients of support comprise less than 1% of the total SME population.

There is also a need to ensure equal opportunities for SMEs across the country to actively participate in achieving net zero emissions.

The presence of numerous separate programmes reflects a fragmented ecosystem with multiple initiatives operating independently, indicating a lack of centralisation and coordination.

The research identified three types of intervention: grant-based, comprehensive audit-based, and light-touch audit-based programmes. The **grant-based approach** offers a comprehensive package with grants, environmental audits, face-to-face help, online resources, networking, training, and events. The **comprehensive audit-based** type excludes

grants but includes similar support elements. The **light-touch audit-based** approach focuses on environmental audits, personalised assistance, and referrals to relevant resources.

Overall, the research highlights fragmentation within the system that supports small enterprises on their net zero path. To ensure SMEs receive effective assistance on the scale required, we conclude that it is crucial to address this fragmentation by centralising and harmonising support programmes and promoting collaboration between delivery and stakeholder organisations.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Key Definitions

SMEs	<p>Small and medium-sized enterprises, categorised as organisations with employee numbers of <=250 people and a turnover of <£44million.</p> <p>There are some variations regionally and locally, and some support programmes have targeted a specific cohort within the ERDF definition, e.g., SMEs with <=50 employees, or industry specific SMEs.</p>
ERDF	The European Regional Development Fund , which ceased to operate in the UK from June 2023.
Net Zero	A catch-all term, used in this report interchangeably with “carbon reduction”, “carbon neutral”, “sustainability”, “decarbonisation” or “green” to reflect the challenge set by the UK Government for all organisations to be net zero by 2050.
Regional Net Zero Hubs	<p>Funded by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, Five Net Zero Hubs in England have an operations team of energy experts that provides Local Enterprise Partnerships, local authorities and others, with practical support to develop local energy projects¹.</p> <p>The five regions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North West Net Zero Hub • North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub • Midlands Net Zero Hub • South West Net Zero Hub • Greater South East Net Zero Hub
Interventions	Collective name for the range of support delivered to SMEs. A single intervention may be part of a programme of Support offered by a provider.
Provider	The organisation or agency responsible for delivering the intervention to SMEs.
Arm’s Length Body	A provider who sits between a Local Authority and independent sector organisation, often delivering on behalf of the Local Authority. Includes Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Growth Hubs.

¹ <https://www.gsetzerohub.org.uk/about/other-hub-regions/>

1.2 Purpose and Background

The aim of this report is to provide a detailed mapping of the breadth and depth of net zero business support available for small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in England to enable them to make their contribution to the UK Government target of meeting net zero emissions by 2050.

The focus of the project has been on schemes, initiatives and organisations offering **specific** or targeted initiatives to support small firms' net zero transition. General business development and growth programmes have been excluded from data collection.

The research and mapping built on an approach taken in a recent mapping exercise undertaken by the Centre for Entrepreneurs (CfE) of Incubators and Accelerators². The CfE report provides several working definitions of different types of support organisations and this report aims to do the same. However, it has not been possible to cross reference taxonomies as the interventions are characteristically too different to compare.

The objectives of the project were to:

1. Compile a comprehensive directory of net zero support providers/initiatives for small firms in each local authority area in England.
2. Use this baseline data to identify a typology of emerging forms of business support and their geographical coverage and to identify 'gaps' or limitations in coverage.
3. Identify examples of good practice within each element of the typology and provide a brief overview of the intervention alongside the directory information.
4. Develop actionable recommendations for government which can help to support the net zero transition more effectively in smaller firms.

The report was commissioned by the [Federation of Small Businesses \(FSB\)](#), a membership organisation offering a wide range of vital business services including advice, financial expertise and support to SMEs, as well as representing the voice of small businesses to government.

² <https://centreforentrepreneurs.org/cfe-research/incubation-nation/> .

2. OVERALL FINDINGS

The research found 282 programmes to promote net zero practices within SMEs across England. The overwhelming majority of programmes included more than one intervention (e.g., grants and then one-to-one support). There were 719 interventions overall. We identified 18 different types of interventions within the programmes with these including, for example, grants, environmental audits, and mentoring. The interventions each varied in terms of their level of comprehensiveness.

2.1 Overview

At the start of 2022 there were an estimated 4,814,495 SMEs (businesses with fewer than 250 employees) in England, supporting a workforce of 14,338,000 people.³

Table 1: SMEs in England by region

Region	Number of businesses	% of total
North East	155,095	3.22
North West	513,065	10.64
Yorkshire & the Humber	385,590	8.00
West Midlands	437,235	9.07
East Midlands	367,995	7.63
East of England	542,895	11.26
South West	521,750	11.15
London	1,037,995	21.52
South East	843,980	17.51
Total England	4,814,495	100

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2022>

Table 1 provides information on the number of SME businesses in England broken down by region in 2022. As the table shows, unsurprisingly, London has the highest number of businesses, with 1,037,995, accounting for 21.52% of the total. The South East had 843,980 businesses, representing 17.51% of the total. The North East is the region with the fewest SMEs, with 155,095 businesses accounting for 3.22% of the total. For comparison the same

³ 2022 figures, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2022/business-population-estimates-for-the-uk-and-regions-2022-statistical-release-html#composition-of-the-2022-business-population> (Accessed 22.05.2023).

data reports 7,675 businesses with greater than 250 employees in England. SMEs represent 99.84% of businesses in England.

The significant number of SMEs in the economy indicates the collective impact they have on climate change. Each business, regardless of its size, contributes to carbon emissions and environmental impact through its operations, energy consumption, supply chains, and waste generation. The actions and decisions of SMEs play a vital role in shaping the overall carbon footprint of the nation. Recognising the environmental impact of these businesses is crucial to understanding the need for sustainable practices and embracing the transition to a low-carbon economy. By adopting measures to reduce emissions, implement energy-efficient processes, promote circular economy practices, and embrace renewable energy sources, SMEs can make a substantial contribution towards mitigating climate change and achieving net zero targets.

The challenge of providing business support for achieving net zero is distinct from conventional business support initiatives. The scale and impact of the climate crisis requires a more comprehensive and accelerated approach to support businesses on their net zero journey. Achieving net zero emissions demands a much higher rate of adoption and transformation across all sectors. Therefore, it is imperative to recognise that the challenge of business support for net zero goes beyond reaching a certain percentage of businesses; it necessitates a swift and widespread transition towards sustainable practices.

As noted above, the research uncovered 282 programmes and 719 interventions. 186 of the programmes (67%) offered more than one intervention. Table 2 below gives a breakdown of the number of SMEs in each region, and the proportion this makes up of the total in England. It also shows a regional breakdown of programmes and interventions. We can see there is considerable regional variation in provision. For example, the North East has 3.03% of SMEs but 4.85% of programmes and 3.75% of interventions. The West Midlands and South West are considerably over-represented in terms of programmes and interventions compared to their proportion of SMEs.

Table 2: Regions, SMEs, programmes and interventions

Region	SMEs		Programmes		Interventions	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
North East	154,870	3.22	11	4.85	25	3.75
North West	512,290	10.64	20	8.81	61	10.39
Yorkshire & Humber	385,030	8.00	15	6.61	41	6.98
West Midlands	436,585	9.07	36	15.86	99	16.87
East Midlands	367,460	7.63	15	6.61	38	6.47
East of England	542,220	11.26	19	8.37	43	7.33
South West	536,925	11.15	37	16.30	102	17.38
London	1,036,315	21.52	39	17.18	99	16.87
South East	842,800	17.51	36	15.86	79	13.46
National level			54		132	
England	4,814,495	100	282		719	

Overall, the findings highlight the existence of a substantial number of programmes and interventions dedicated to supporting SMEs in England with their net zero journey. However, we can also see that these programmes are not reaching the vast majority of the overall population of businesses. In addition, the presence of a high number of different programmes may also reflect a fragmented net zero support landscape, with many programmes but each having few clients.

Figure 1: Typology and prevalence of intervention types

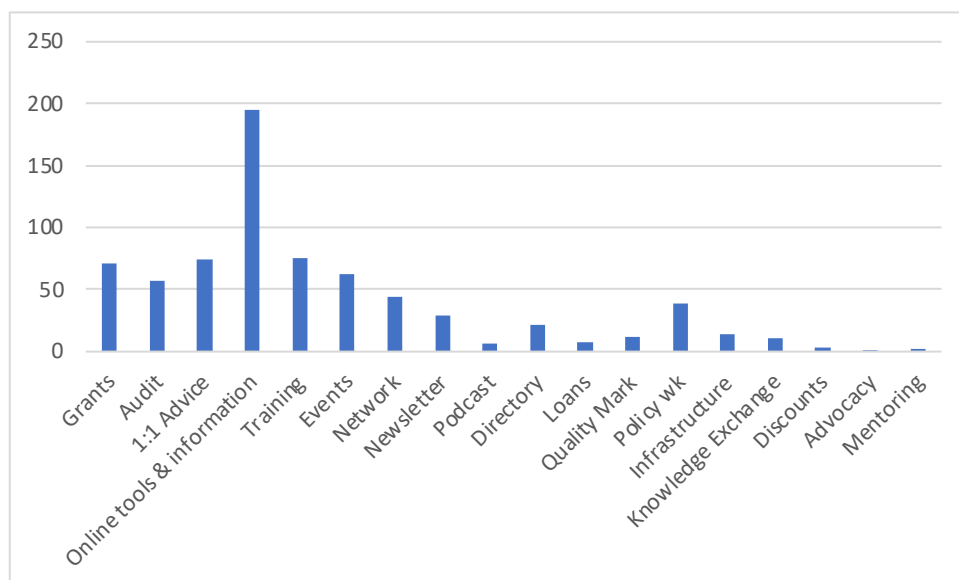


Figure 1 shows that the most frequent form of intervention provided was online tools and information (excluding instances where providers simply redirect to commonly accessible resources). Several other interventions are prevalent, including grants, audits, events and

training, one-to-one advice or consultancy, networks, newsletters, and peer-led activities. These interventions offer SMEs a diverse range of support mechanisms. Later in the report, we outline three typical patterns of support in more detail.

The structure of the programmes varied, with some following a highly structured approach. For instance, in certain cases, access to grant funding or one-on-one support may be contingent upon completing an audit as a prerequisite. To provide more comprehensive insights into the available support for SMEs and the similarities and differences between regions, we include mini-case studies at the end of each regional summary in chapter 3 of the report to highlight specific programmes.

It is noteworthy that very few interventions required payment, with 92% of programmes offered for free.

Table 3: Pricing models of programmes

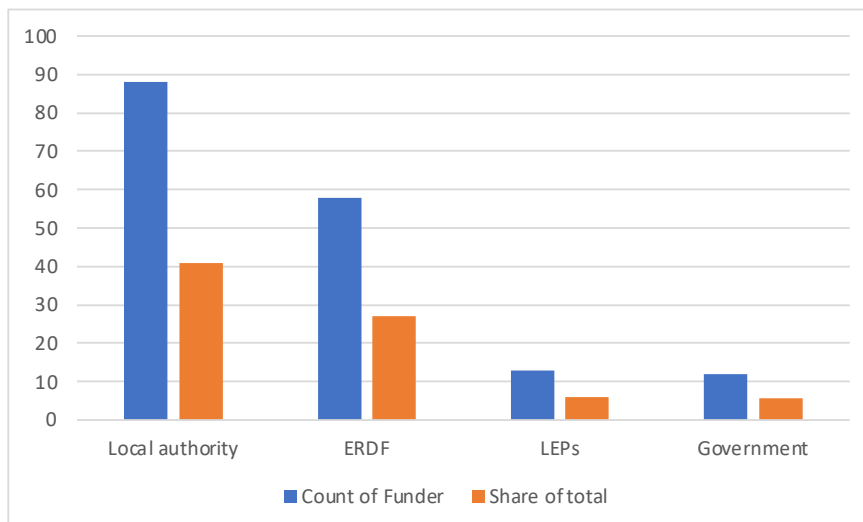
Pricing model type		
Free	245	92%
Mix	2	0.75%
Paid for	20	7.25%

2.2 Programme funding

The funding landscape for net zero business support primarily consists of statutory sources, with a significant emphasis on funds from local and national governments. Additionally, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) serves as a third element, although it is crucial to note that ERDF schemes included in the analysis were active until the formal end date of June 2023, after which the UK's eligibility was affected by Brexit. The small number of 'other' funders includes self-funding or paid schemes, private sector Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds, and third-sector funding see figure 2.

Figure 2: The net zero funding landscape





Unfortunately, limited information is available regarding the precise level of investment in these programmes. Published figures for 23 out of the 282 programmes indicate a total investment of £613 million, averaging £26.65 million per programme. However, we can't ascertain if these figures accurately represent the remaining 282 programmes, particularly as those programmes that secure more funding are more likely to report it. If the figures are representative, the total investment across all programmes would amount to approximately £7,515 million, which would mean £3,120 per VAT-registered or PAYE-registered business in England. Considering that many of these programmes offer grants, this amount may seem relatively modest for a policy of such significance. Moreover, it is important to note that approximately one-third of the funding has already finished, due to the ending of the EDRF.

Within the realm of business support for net zero, ERDF funds have played a dominant role. Out of the 20 projects reporting funding amounts exceeding £1 million, 13 were partially funded by this route, totalling £543.95 million. A considerable portion of the funding for this type of business support has, therefore, recently concluded. Additionally, a major international bank contributed £500 million, while a combined authority provided £10.6 million.

The reliance on statutory funds, particularly from local and national government, along with the involvement of ERDF and other funders, has shaped the financial aspects of net zero support programmes. However, the specific investment levels remain somewhat elusive, and caution should be exercised in generalising from the published figures.

Despite this, it is evident that significant funding has been directed towards business support for net zero. The end of ERDF funding does not account for all those programmes for which support has ended. At the time of writing, there are programmes supported by local authorities

that are temporarily closed because they are dependent on future funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which is suffering from a delayed rollout.

The prevalence of local authorities as funders is a positive indication for the future of the programmes, making it more likely they will continue. They will need substantial funds though to continue at the present rate.

2.3 Programme providers

Local authorities emerge as the primary providers of net zero support for SMEs as well as being the primary funders. In cases where other providers are involved, those organisations often collaborate with local authorities or receive funding from them. Collaboration is common, with programmes being delivered in partnership with various entities such as other local authorities (in cases involving multiple localities), universities, or dedicated net zero agencies.

The providers involved in SME net zero support can be categorised into different types. Local authorities take the lead, with a count of 88 programmes attributed to them. The private sector follows with 59 programmes, while arms-length bodies and third-sector organisations contribute 30 and 27 programmes respectively. Universities are also actively engaged, with 21 programmes dedicated to SME net zero support. Other providers include Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), regional authorities, charities, community interest companies (CICs), Chambers of Commerce, colleges, entities representing the UK government, and banks.

This diverse range of provider types reflects the collaborative efforts and partnerships formed to deliver comprehensive support to SMEs in their net zero journey. The involvement of local authorities as the dominant provider highlights their crucial role in facilitating and coordinating sustainable initiatives at the local level.

Table 4: Types of net zero support providers

Provider type	Count
Local authority	88
Private sector	59
Arm’s-length body	30
Third sector	27
University	21
LEP	12
Regional authority	7
Charity	3
CIC	3

Chamber of Commerce	2
College	2
Government	2
Bank	1

2.4 Organisations supported

Most programmes and interventions, as specified, were designed to be inclusive and open to all SMEs. The focus was on providing support and resources to SMEs across various sectors without targeting specific industries. However, it is worth noting that a few programmes did cater specifically to certain sectors, such as manufacturing, tourism, and hospitality, or business-to-business (B2B) enterprises. These targeted programmes aimed to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs operating in those sectors.

Furthermore, it is interesting to observe that only five schemes were exclusively dedicated to SMEs with 100 or fewer employees. This indicates that the support programmes have not been targeted at microenterprises. The intention was generally to ensure that businesses of a range of different sizes could benefit from the available support.

It is important to highlight that while many programmes were not explicitly labelled as SME-specific, they still included SMEs as part of their core beneficiaries. These programmes recognised the vital role that SMEs play in achieving net zero goals and aimed to provide tailored support and guidance to meet their needs.

2.5 Evidence of success

Out of the 282 programmes identified, a subset of 36 published evidence of their impact and offering some insights into the effectiveness of their interventions. These programmes went beyond simply providing support and actively sought to measure and showcase the outcomes achieved by SMEs through their participation.

Publishing evidence of impact demonstrates a commitment to transparency and accountability, allowing stakeholders to assess the tangible benefits derived from the programmes. Some of the programmes estimated the amount of carbon saved – making it possible to enable some assessment of efficiency. Even in these cases, however, some of the estimates of carbon saved involved further support which was not quantified, making comparisons here nearly impossible.

A number of programmes provided evidence of their success using statistics of popularity such as the number of businesses helped, which is clearly bolstered by grant support. Although case studies detail how grants were utilised, these programmes do not offer a comprehensive understanding of the financial support provided and its direct impact on the supported SMEs. Case studies are useful for increased engagement as they provide concrete examples of how grants were effectively deployed and they showcase the diverse range of activities undertaken, such as adopting energy-efficient technologies, implementing sustainable practices in production processes, or investing in renewable energy sources. However, they do not tell us which of the programmes were more successful.

This is a shame, because the publication of evaluation evidence not only serves as a testament to the effectiveness of the programmes, but also fosters a culture of learning and knowledge-sharing. Other programmes and stakeholders can learn from these stories, gaining insights into the most impactful strategies and approaches.

2.6 Summary

The research found a significant number of net zero support programmes and interventions in England. Many of these programmes realised the necessity of providing SMEs with a wide range of assistance and resources, as well as several channels of assistance. The most popular sort of support readily available to SMEs was online tools and information. In addition, grants, audits, events and training, one-on-one treatment or advising, networks, newsletters, and peer-led activities are all common strategies. These interventions provide SMEs with a variety of assistance options.

Overall, however, the analysis also highlighted the fragmented nature of the net zero support landscape, with many programmes having few clients, indicating a poor level of revenue.

Although the exact amount invested in net zero assistance projects is unknown, public numbers for 23 of 282 programmes show a total investment of £613 million. However, it's unclear whether these data adequately represent the level of investment in the remaining programmes.

Local governments are the primary source of net zero support, with programmes frequently provided in partnership with other local authorities, institutions, or specific net zero organisations. Most projects and interventions were designed to be inclusive and open to all

SMEs, with a focus on providing support and resources to SMEs across a wide range of industries rather than focusing on a single industry.

A minority of programmes stood out by releasing evidence of their impact and providing useful insights into the efficacy of their interventions. When it was provided, evidence describing how grants were used provided useful knowledge on the financial assistance offered and its direct impact on the supported SMEs. The release of impact evidence and case studies not only provides as evidence of the initiatives' effectiveness, but it also encourages a culture of learning and knowledge-sharing.



3. REGIONAL SUMMARIES

The English regions are far from uniform, with the prevalence of regional inequalities being a key reason that ‘levelling up’ has been developed as a policy in recent years to reduce imbalances. If economic imbalances are important, it may be useful to ask the question as to whether all English regions have equal provision for net zero support.

This section examines the provision of net zero support to SMEs by region across England. Regions differ in their exposure to different industries suggesting that there may be a case for different approaches across the nine regions. Although the region is a useful unit of analysis, it is also important to note that there may be differences within regions too, creating a ‘postcode lottery’ when it comes to support.

Each regional summary below begins with a presentation of some key facts around the number of LEPs, programmes and support. A chart on the interventions in the region, and tables on funding, providers, the scope of programmes (from local to national), and the coverage by local enterprise partnership areas (LEPs) follow. Each region also has an example of an exemplar programme. We take each region in turn and conclude the section with a section on England-wide provision.

3.1. North East

Key Facts

2 LEPs	North East, Tees Valley,
Number of Programmes:	11
Number of Interventions:	25
SME share:	3.22%
Interventions share:	3.75%
Programmes for SMEs ONLY	3
Programmes with >1 intervention:	6
Most extensive programme	The Business Energy Saving Team (BEST) North of Tyne Combined Authority
Published investment	£2.37m (two programmes)
Pricing	10 Programmes = Free to SMEs

This region is covered by two LEPs: North East and Tees Valley. There were 11 programmes in the North East dedicated to supporting SMEs on their net zero journey. These 11 programmes consisted of 25 interventions or initiatives. The North East has approximately 3.22% of the total SME stock in England. The interventions specifically targeted at SMEs made up approximately 3.75% of the total interventions across England, meaning that the North East

was offering slightly more net zero interventions compared with its number of SMEs. Among the 11 programmes, three were exclusively focused on SMEs. Of the 11 programmes, six offered more than one intervention, indicating a comprehensive approach to supporting SMEs. The Business Energy Saving Team (BEST) within the North of Tyne Combined Authority was identified as the most extensive programme. Two programmes within these LEPs have a published investment amounting to £2.37 million. Out of the 11 programmes, 10 were free to SMEs.

Figure 3: Breakdown of intervention types – North East

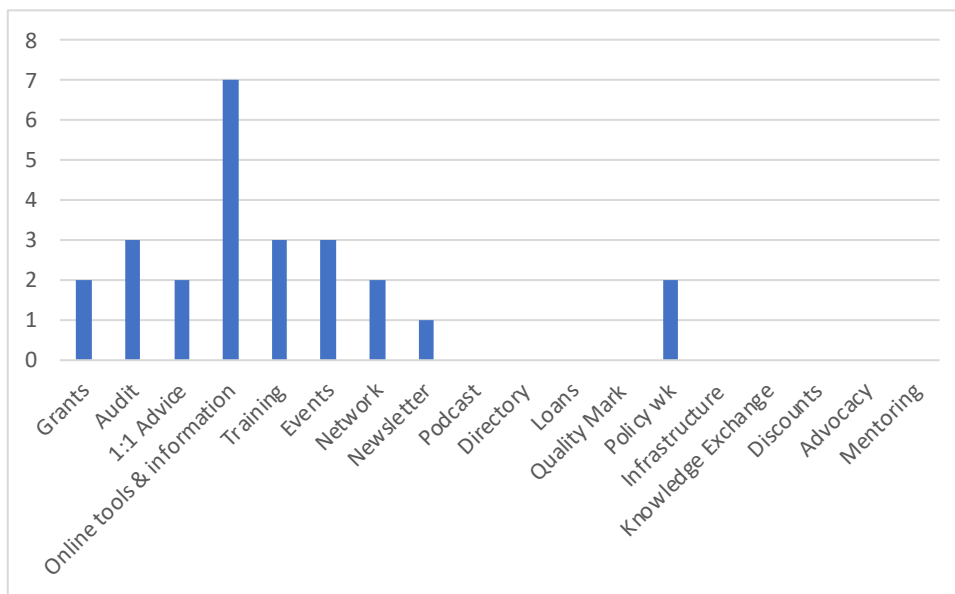


Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the types of interventions in the North East. Two programmes provided grants. Three provided audits. Two provided one-to-one advice. The most popular intervention (provided by seven programmes) was to signpost to online tools and information. Training was part of three programmes and three included events. Two programmes offered networking opportunities. One had a newsletter and two involved policy work. No interventions in the North East of England included podcasts, directory loans, a quality mark, infrastructure support, knowledge exchange or discounts, advocacy and mentoring.

Table 5: Types of provider - North East

	Frequency
Arm's-length body	4
Local authority	4
Private sector	1
Third sector	2

Net zero support providers in the North East include local authorities (four), arm's-length bodies (four), the third sector (two), and one from the private sector. Relative to other areas arm's-length and third sector provision is common in the North East of England.

Table 6: Funders of net zero support - North East

Funder	Frequency
Charity	2
ERDF	3
Local authority	4
LEP	2

Table 6 shows the various funders of net zero support within the North East. Local authorities had the highest frequency (four), followed by ERDF funding (three) the LEPs, (two), and then charities (two). The ERDF was funding over 25% of the programmes in this region.

Table 7: Coverage of net zero support programmes - North East

	Frequency
Local	5
Regional	6

Table 7 illustrates the geographic scope of the North East's net zero support programmes. In contrast to other regions, a regional focus is slightly more dominant here, with six programmes focused at this level, compared to five programmes with a local focus.

Table 8: Programmes by LEP - North East

	Frequency
North East LEP	10
Tees Valley	1

Table 8 highlights the location of support by LEP areas in the region. Ten programmes were based in the North East LEP area, with just one in the Tees Valley. This is a stark difference, although the North East LEP covers a population of 2m which represents at least 70% of the North East region. The North East LEP covers the local authority areas of County Durham,

Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland. Consequently, we might expect some imbalance in provision.

Spotlight on The Business Energy Saving Team (BEST) – ERDF funded

<https://www.bestne.co.uk/#:~:text=The%20Business%20Energy%20Saving%20Team,and%20reduce%20your%20carbon%20footprint>

Interventions offered:

- Grants
- Energy Audit
- 1:1 advice
- Events

Offered: Free to businesses in the North East

The BEST programme involves a free energy audit delivered by a third party contractor. Businesses are then offered a range of options which might reduce their carbon footprint. This can then be supported by grants from the programme. Essentially the programme aims to enable firms to access support to make significant changes to their operations. It does not develop an ongoing relationship to assist businesses.

The BEST project received £670,000 from the EDRF as part of the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme. It performed over 200 energy audits for SMEs, assisting them in leveraging approximately £500,000 in matched funds for energy upgrades and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by over 600 tonnes.

Although the main BEST initiative has concluded, businesses are encouraged to contact best@newcastle.gov.uk for further information on future and alternative help. since the programme has shown impact it is being considered for future funding through the combined authorities in the North East.

3.2 North West England

Key Facts

5 LEPs	Cumbria, Lancashire, Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Warrington
Number of Programmes:	20
Number of Interventions:	61
SME share:	10.64%
Interventions share:	10.39%
Programmes for SMEs ONLY	7
Programmes with >1 intervention:	17
Most extensive programme	Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce GREEN SCENE
Published investment	£6.755m
Pricing	19 Programmes = Free to SMEs

This region covers several LEP areas: Cumbria, Lancashire, Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, and Cheshire and Warrington. Twenty programmes are available in the North West region, with 61 interventions.

The proportion of England’s SMEs located in the North West is 10.64%. In this case, 10.39% of the interventions are intended to help SMEs, since the North West has 10.64% of SMEs suggesting the North West is marginally underweighted in Net Zero initiatives. Seven programmes were only available to SMEs and not available to larger firms or other entities. The number of programmes that provided more than one intervention was 17. The value of the programmes where it was reported on the website was £6.755 million. The pricing structure of the programmes shows that 19 of the 20 programmes are free to SMEs.

Figure 4: Breakdown of intervention types – North West

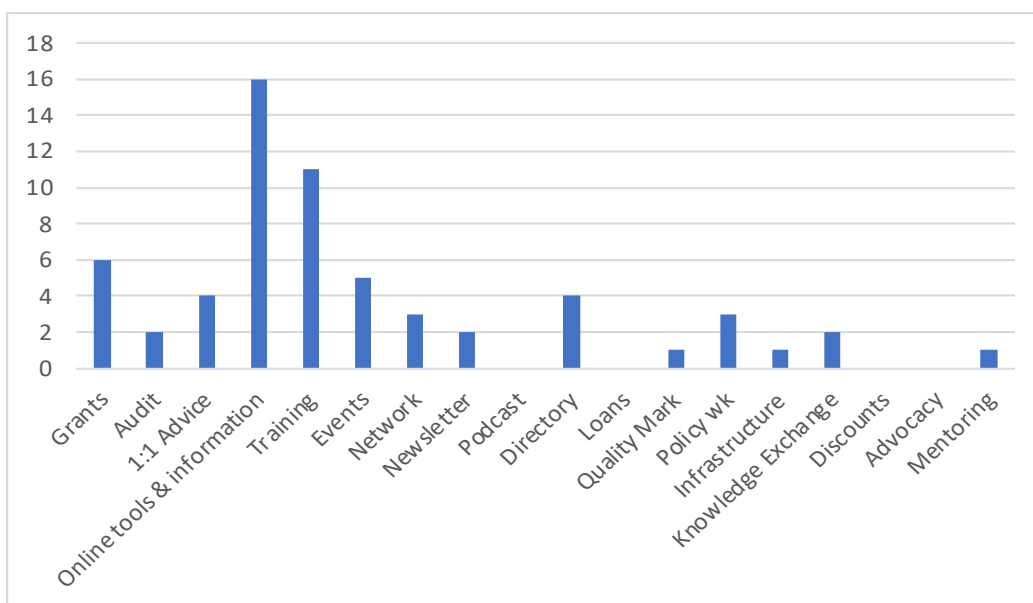


Figure 4 gives a breakdown of the interventions in the region. The most popular intervention is online tools and information accounting for 16 interventions, followed by 11 programmes providing training. Six programmes provided grants. Five provided events. Four programmes provide one to one advice, and only two programmes reported providing audits.

Table 9: Funders of net zero support - North West

Funder	Count
ERDF	6
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	2
Liverpool City Region	1
Skills Development Fund	1

Table 9 lists the funders of the programmes in the North West. Six programmes were funded by the EDRF in this region. Greater Manchester Combined Authority funded two programmes, Liverpool City Region funded one programme, and one was funded via the Skills Development Fund.

Table 10: Types of provider – North West

Provider	Count
Arm’s length body	6
College	2
Local authority	2
Private sector	6
Third sector	2
University	2

Table 10 summarises the type of providers in the region. Arm’s-length bodies and private sector organisations were the most prevalent providers, each running six programmes.

Table 11: Coverage of net zero support programmes - North West

Coverage	Count
Local	13
Regional	6

As table 11 shows, most of the programmes in this region were aimed at the local level, with 13 operating at this level compared to six regional programmes. This is a typical pattern found in other regions.

Table 12: Programmes by LEP - North West

LEP	Count
Cheshire	1
Cumbria	7
Greater Manchester	7
Lancashire	3
Liverpool City Region	4

In terms of coverage by LEP, Cumbria and Greater Manchester LEPs had the most programmes with seven each. Liverpool City Region had four programmes and Lancashire had three. Cheshire had one programme.

We have highlighted the private sector Green Small Business Programme as the exemplar in this region.

Spotlight on Green Small Business – private sector

<https://greensmallbusiness.com/>

Interventions offered:

- Environmental audit
- Energy Management Systems
- 1:1 advice
- Training and events
- Online tools
- Quality marks

Offered: Paid for to businesses in the North West and nationally

The Green Small Business programme is a private sector programme. It offers a free online step-by-step guide. It then presents an upfront cost for businesses should they want help with developing an environmental management system. The costs were under £430 at the time of writing. Other services such as a carbon reduction plan to meet procurement procedures were more expensive. The Green Small Business programme aims to demystify the process of reducing a firm’s carbon footprint. It is a focused programme designed to enable businesses to develop a systematic approach to net zero.

3.3 Yorkshire and Humber

Key Facts

4 LEPs	York & North Yorkshire, Leeds City Region, Hull & East Yorkshire, Sheffield City Region.
Number of Programmes:	15
Number of Interventions:	41
SME share:	8.00%
Interventions share:	6.98%
Programmes for SMEs ONLY	5
Programmes with >1 intervention:	12
Most extensive programme	University of Sheffield, Advanced Resource Efficiency Centre
Published investment	£13.25m (3 programmes)
Pricing	15 Programmes = Free to SMEs

This region includes four different LEPs. There were 15 programmes found in the region, with 41 interventions. The share of England’s SMEs in Yorkshire & Humberside is 8.00% and the share of interventions was 6.98%.

Five programmes in the region were only for SMEs. Twelve of the 15 programmes had more than one intervention on offer. The most thorough programme was at the University of Sheffield Advanced Resource Efficiency Centre. Stated investment in the region was £13.25 million (based on the three programmes providing figures). All 15 programmes were available to SMEs free of charge.

Figure 5: Breakdown of intervention types – Yorkshire and the Humber

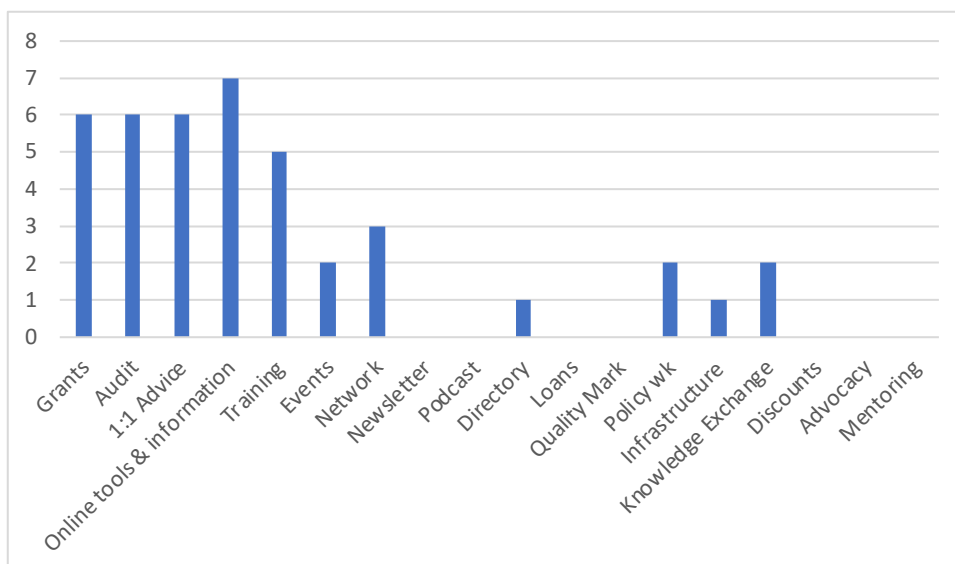


Figure 5 provides a breakdown of the types of interventions found in Yorkshire and the Humber. Six programmes provided grants, six performed audits, and six provided one-to-one advice. The most popular intervention was to signpost to online tools and information (seven

programmes). Training was part of five programmes. Two programmes included events. Three offered networking opportunities and one included a directory, and two included policy work. One included infrastructure support and two included knowledge exchange. No interventions in Yorkshire and the Humber included newsletters, podcasts, loans, quality marks, or discounts advocacy and mentoring.

Table 13: Funders of net zero support - Yorkshire and the Humber

Funder	Frequency
ERDF	5
Government	1
Local authority	4
LEPS	2
Charity	1
Other	1
Private	1
University	1

Table 13 shows the funders of net zero programmes in the region. ERDF was the most prevalent funder (five programmes) followed by local authorities (four), LEPS (two). Other funders included a charity, a private sector provider, a government body and a university.

Table 14: Providers of net zero support - Yorkshire and the Humber

	Frequency
Arm’s-length body	5
LEP	2
Local Authority	5
Private Sector	1
University	2

Table 14 shows that arm’s-length bodies and local authorities were the most prevalent provider of support in the region supporting five programmes each. Then three other types of provider each supported two programmes - LEPs, and a university. A private sector organisation supported one.

Table 15: Coverage of net zero support programmes - Yorkshire & Humberside

	Frequency
Local	10
Regional	4
National	1

As table 15 shows, the vast majority of programmes in this region are focussed locally (10). Four programmes provided regional level coverage and one programme was national with reach into Yorkshire and the Humber.

Table 16: Programmes by LEP - Yorkshire and the Humber

	Frequency
Sheffield City Region	4
York & North Yorkshire	3
Hull & East Yorkshire	8
Leeds City Region	3

Table 5 shows that programmes were particularly prevalent in the Hull and East Yorkshire LEP area (eight programmes), followed by the Sheffield City Region area (four). The two other LEP areas had three programmes each, York & North Yorkshire (three) and Leeds City Region (three). Some programmes crossed over LEP boundaries so the total is greater than the 15 programmes.

Spotlight on University of Sheffield Advanced Resource Efficiency Centre (AREC)
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/arec>

Interventions offered

- one to one advice
- training and events
- networking
- infrastructure
- knowledge exchange
- policy work

AREC brings together academics, businesses and policy makers to meet the challenge of promoting resource efficiency and sustainability across supply chains.

SMEs are invited to collaborate with large industrial partners and benefit from the knowledge infrastructure and research from the university. Additionally, there is access to funding skills and facilities from the university partner to find more sustainable approaches to their operations. One of the key issues in scaling up net zero may well be capacity building. AREC is one of the few institutions that seem to develop some capacity-building given that the students are also involved in visits to companies.

3.4 East Midlands

Key Facts	
4 LEPs	South East Midlands (SEMLEP), Leicester & Leicestershire, D2N2 (covering Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire), Greater Lincolnshire
Number of Programmes:	15
Number of Interventions:	38
SME share:	7.63%
Interventions share:	6.47%
Programmes for SMEs ONLY	10
Programmes with >1 intervention:	9
Most extensive programme	Sustainability in Enterprise Nottingham Trent University
Published investment	£86.6m (6 programmes maximum funds)
Pricing	15 Programmes = Free to SMEs

This region has four LEPs: South East Midlands, Leicester & Leicestershire, D2N2 and Greater Lincolnshire. There were 15 programmes identified, with 38 interventions. The East Midlands is home to 7.63% of England’s SMEs but the intervention share is only 6.47% suggesting this region is underrepresented in net zero programmes per SME.

The number of programmes targeted specifically at SMEs was ten. Nine programmes had more than one intervention. The most complete programme was the Sustainability in Enterprise programme at Nottingham Trent University. The published investment amount in this region was £86.6 million (from six programmes). All 14 programmes were available to SME free of charge.

Figure 6: Breakdown of interventions – East Midland

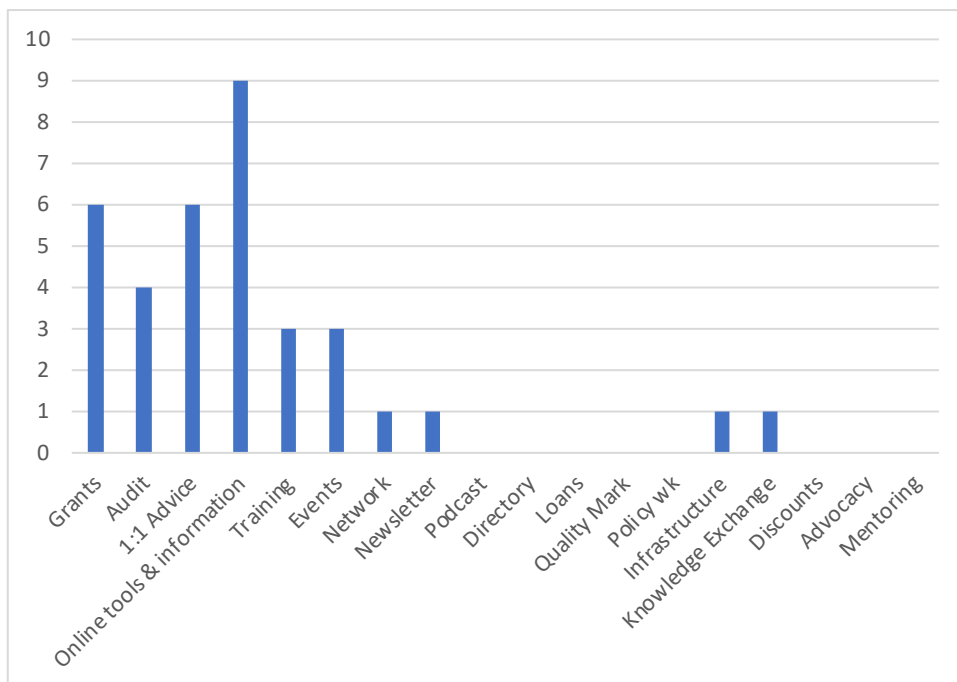


Figure 6 provides a breakdown of the types of interventions in the region. Grants were prevalent in this region with six programmes providing grants. Four programmes offered audits. Six provided advice. Signposting to online tools and information was provided by nine programmes. Training was part of three programmes. Three programmes included events. No interventions in the East Midlands included podcasts directories, loans, quality marks, policy, discounts, advocacy or mentoring.

Table 17: Funders of net zero support - East Midlands

Funder	Frequency
ERDF	7
Government	3
Local authority	4
Other	1

Table 17 shows that in terms of funders, ERDF was most prevalent (seven programmes), followed by local authorities (four) and government bodies (three)

Table 18: Providers of net zero support - East Midlands

	Frequency
LEP	1
Local authority	5
Private sector	3
University	5
Other	1

Table 18 shows that in this region universities are the most prevalent providers (five), along with local authorities (five) and followed by the private sector organisations (three). The high level of participation or collaboration with universities stands out in this region.

Table 19: Coverage of net zero support - East Midlands

	Frequency
Local	12
Regional	3

As table 19 shows, most programmes in this region (twelve) have a local focus. Three programmes had regional coverage.

Table 20: Provision by LEP area - East Midlands

	Frequency
D2N2	7
Leicester and Leicestershire	4
SEMLEP	1
Greater Lincolnshire	3

Table 20 shows that net zero support programmes are most prevalent in the area covered by the D2N2 LEP (seven programmes). Leicester and Leicestershire had four programmes Greater Lincolnshire had three. and the SEMLEP area had one.

Spotlight on Sustainability in Enterprise

<https://www.ntu.ac.uk/business-and-employers/financial-and-fundedsupport/sustainability-in-enterprise>

Interventions offered:

- Grants
- 1:1 advice
- Training and Events
- Online tools

Offered: Free support to businesses in Greater Nottingham

The Sustainability in Enterprise program, funded by the EDRF and executed by Nottingham Trent University, played a pivotal role in assisting 218 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Greater Nottingham on their net zero journey from 2021 to 2023. This resulted in a significant reduction of approximately 1,000 metric tonnes of annual carbon emissions.

SMEs participating in the Sustainability in Enterprise programme received a minimum of 12 hours of dedicated support or a grant. Notably, the response from the university exceeded expectations, with the product design strand alone offering up to approximately 100 hours of consulting. This comprehensive approach enabled businesses to gain a thorough understanding of their current carbon emissions and identify viable methods for reducing their carbon footprint.

One of the key features of the programme was the provision of consulting services from the university, specifically in the areas of design and premises. This allowed participating businesses to tap into the expertise of the university while simultaneously offering valuable learning experiences for students, who were able to apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios. As part of the programme, 55 business members were trained in calculating their carbon footprint, further enhancing their capacity for sustainable practises.

While a minority of businesses (31 in total) received support through grants, it is important to note that the programme offered a comprehensive range of services beyond financial assistance. This holistic approach ensured that SMEs had access to the necessary tools, resources, and guidance to make impactful changes in their operations.

The Sustainability in Enterprise programme has generated an impact statement that highlights the positive transformations experienced by participating firms. With a total budget of £4 million, the average investment per firm amounted to £18,348.62, reflecting the significant commitment made to support each individual SME on their net zero journey.

3.5 West Midlands

Key Facts

5 LEPs	Black Country, The Marches, Worcestershire, Coventry & Warwickshire, Greater Birmingham & Solihull
Number of Programmes:	36
Number of Interventions:	99
SME share:	9.07%
Interventions share:	16.87%
Programmes for SMEs ONLY	14
Programmes with >1 intervention:	24
Most extensive programme	Coventry and Warwickshire Green Business Programme
Published investment	£11.25m (8 programmes)
Pricing	33 Programmes = Free to SMEs

The West Midlands includes five LEPs: Black Country, The Marches, Worcestershire, Coventry & Warwickshire, Greater Birmingham & Solihull. There were 36 programmes identified in this region, with 99 interventions. The West Midlands is home to 9.07% of England’s SMEs, but the interventions share was 16.87%, suggesting this region is overrepresented in terms of net zero programmes per SME compared to other areas.

Fourteen programmes were targeted specifically at SMEs only. Twenty-four programmes had more than one intervention. The most complete programme was the Coventry and Warwickshire Green Business Programme. The investment reported was 11.25m from the eight programmes which reported a figure. There were 33 programmes in the region available to SMEs for free.

Figure 7: Breakdown of intervention types – West Midlands

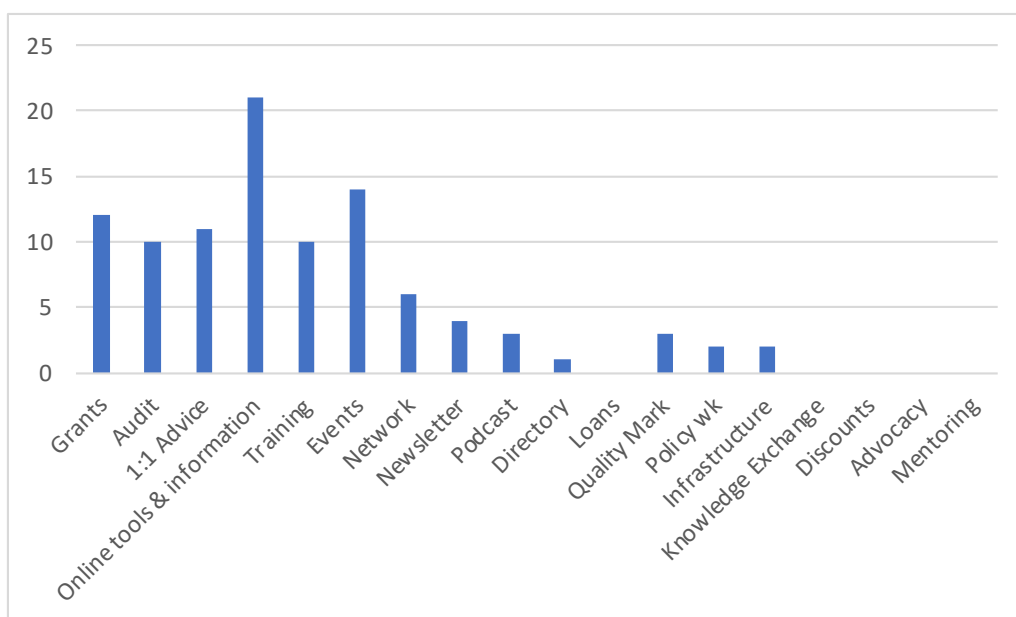


Figure 7 shows the breakdown of interventions in the region. Grants were offered as part of 12 programmes. There were 11 programmes offering one-to-one advice. Online tools and information were provided on 21 programmes. There were 10 programmes where training sessions were offered. Events were part of 14 programmes. Three programmes awarded a quality mark. Two programmes included policy work and two programmes provided infrastructure support. There were no recorded instances of delivery of knowledge exchange, discounts advocacy or mentoring.

Table 21: Funders of net zero support - West Midlands

Funder	Frequency
ERDF	10
Government	2
Local authority	15
LEPs	6
Charity	2
Other	1

Table 21 shows the funding landscape in the region. The most frequent funder was local authority (15 programmes). ERDF funds were used for 10 programmes. LEPs funded six programmes.

Table 22: Providers of net zero support - West Midlands

Provider	Frequency
Arm’s-length body	4
Charity	2
LEP	5
Local authority	19
Private sector	1
University	4

As table 22 shows, the local authority was by far the most prevalent provider of support in this region (19 programmes). Arm’s length bodies and universities provided four programmes each and LEPs provided five.

Table 23: Coverage of net zero support - West Midlands

Coverge	Frequency
Local	16
N/A	1
Regional	19

As table 23 shows, 19 programmes in the region had regional coverage, with a similar amount (16) having local level coverage.

Table 24: Provision by LEP – West Midlands

LEP area	Frequency
Black Country	3
Coventry and Warwickshire	7
Greater Birmingham & Solihull	6
Black Country	3
Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire	7
The Marches	6
Worcestershire	3

Table 24 shows the provision of net zero support by LEP area in the region. Seven programmes were found in the Coventry and Warwickshire area and a further seven in Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire LEP area. Six programmes were found in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP area and a further six in the Marches LEP area. the other LEP areas in the region had three programmes each.

Spotlight on Coventry and Warwickshire Green Business Programme, Coventry and Warwickshire local authorities, delivered in partnership with Coventry University
<https://www.coventry.gov.uk/coventry-warwickshire-green-business-programme/coventry-warwickshire-green-business-programme-1>

Interventions offered:

- Grants
- Audits
- 1:1 advice
- Online tools
- Training and events
- Network
- Newsletter
- Podcast
- Directory

Offered: Free to SMEs, with a focus on advanced manufacturing & engineering

The Coventry and Warwickshire Green Business Programme assists businesses with fewer than 250 employees in Coventry and Warwickshire that wish to save money on energy, waste, and water costs while also taking advantage of low-carbon opportunities. The programme was aimed at manufacturers who would be perhaps more likely to be producing carbon emissions.

Since the programme's inception in 2016:

- Grants totaling £2.5 million have been awarded to 250 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- Over 14,000 tonnes of CO2 have been saved.

- 150 SMEs have received non-financial assistance, resulting in the creation of 60 new employment.
- The Green Business Network now has 2450 members.

This comprehensive approach enabled businesses to gain a thorough understanding of their current carbon emissions and identify viable methods for reducing their carbon footprint. Grants amounted to an average of £10,000 per SME. The programme has helped 400 businesses over seven years. There are estimated to be 40,740 businesses in Coventry and Warwickshire⁴ so the initiative reached 0.98% of businesses in Coventry and Warwickshire. Even the impressive number on the Green Business Network are just 6% of the business stock.

3.6 East of England

Key Facts

3 LEPs	Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, New Anglia, South East (SELEP).
Number of Programmes:	19
Number of Interventions:	43
SME share:	11.26%
Interventions share:	7.33%
Programmes for SMEs ONLY	10
Programmes with >1 intervention:	10
Most extensive programme	Carbon Charter Net Zero Suffolk
Published investment	£120k (2 programmes maximum funds disbursed)
Pricing	18 Programmes = Free to SMEs

There are three Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in the East of England: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, New Anglia and South East (SELEP). There were 19 programmes identified, with 43 interventions. The East of England is home to 11.26% of England's SMEs, but the interventions share is only 7.33% suggesting this region is underrepresented in net zero programmes per SME. Programmes targeted at SMEs only amounted to ten, and ten programmes had more than one intervention. The most complete programme was the Carbon Charter. Eighteen programmes were available to SMEs for free.

⁴ Source: <https://www.cw-chamber.co.uk/news/business-growth-170222/>

Figure 8: Breakdown of intervention types – East of England

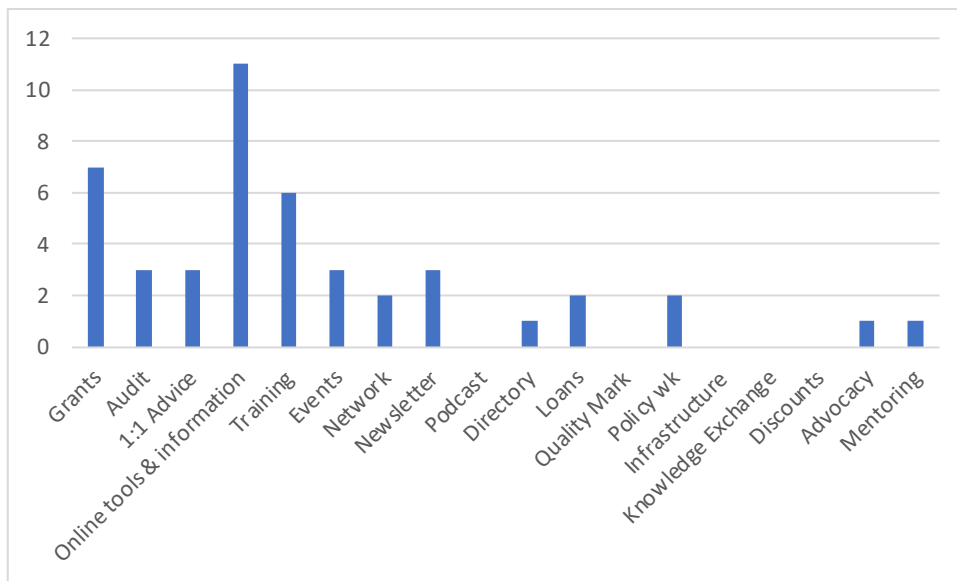


Figure 8 provides a breakdown of the types of interventions in the region. Seven programmes provided grants, three programmes offered audits, and three provided advice. The most popular intervention was signposting to online tools and information (11 programmes). Training was part of six programmes. Three programmes included events. Two offered networking opportunities and a further two offered loans and policy work. No programmes in the East of England included podcasts, infrastructure support and knowledge exchange, quality marks, or discounts.

Table 25: Funders of net zero support - East of England

Funder	Frequency
ERDF	4
Government	2
Local authority	5
Private	3
Other	5

Table 25 shows a variety of funding approaches in this region. ERDF funding was used for four programmes. Local authorities funded the largest number of programmes (five), followed by the private sector (three), then government organisation (two), and there were several various funders classified as other (five).

Table 26: Providers of net zero support - East of England

Provider	Frequency
Arm's-length	2
Local authority	5
Private sector	3
Third sector	6
Government	1
University	2

Table 26 shows the range of providers of support in the region, again there is diversity here. The third sector was the most prevalent provider (six programmes) followed by local authorities (five), and the private sector (three). Universities provided two programmes, and government organisations provided one.

Table 27: Coverage of net zero support - East of England

Coverage	Frequency
Local	10
Regional	6
National	3

Table 27 provides information about the coverage of programmes in the region. Most programmes (ten) have a local focus, but regional coverage is also significant, with six programmes operating at this broader level. There were three national level programmes operating in the region.

Table 28: Provision by LEP area - East of England

LEP area	Frequency
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	10
New Anglia	9
SELEP	2

*Some programmes cover more than one LEP area.

Table 28 shows where provision was located in the region. The highest number of programmes was found in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough (ten) followed by New Anglia (nine). Two programmes were found in the SELEP area.

Spotlight on Carbon Charter - Environment Agency and Suffolk County Council on behalf of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership

<https://carboncharter.org/>

Interventions offered:

- Audits
- 1:1 advice
- Online tools
- Training and events

Offered: Free to SMEs in Norfolk and Suffolk

The Carbon Charter, delivered by Groundwork East and overseen by the Environment Agency and Suffolk County Council on behalf of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, provides guidance, support, and recognition to small and medium-sized businesses throughout Suffolk and Norfolk as they work towards net zero. The programme signposts to grants from others, but focuses on one-to-one advice and online tools to enable businesses to develop their own net zero plan.

More than 500 charters have been given since the inception of the programme by Suffolk County Council and the Environment Agency. Every Carbon Charter member has been independently evaluated for sustainability and recognised for their efforts to become more sustainable.

3.7 London

Key Facts

One LEP	LEAP/Mayor of London
Number of Programmes:	39
Number of Interventions:	99
SME share:	21.52%
Interventions share:	16.87%
Programmes for SMEs ONLY	6
Programmes with >1 intervention:	23
Most extensive programme	Climate Essentials for Business, LB Westminster
Published investment	£33m (4 interventions) + £500m Mayor of London
Pricing	39 Programmes = Free to SMEs

Thirty-nine programmes were identified in London, with 99 interventions. London hosts 21.52% of England's, SMEs but the interventions share is 16.87% suggesting London is underrepresented in net zero interventions per SME. Programmes for SMEs only amounted to six in London, and 23 programmes had more than one intervention. The most complete programme was the Climate Essentials for Business. Published investment found £33m from four interventions, with the addition of £500m from the Mayor of London which was supported by the ERDF. All programmes were free to SMEs.

Figure 9: Breakdown of types of intervention - London

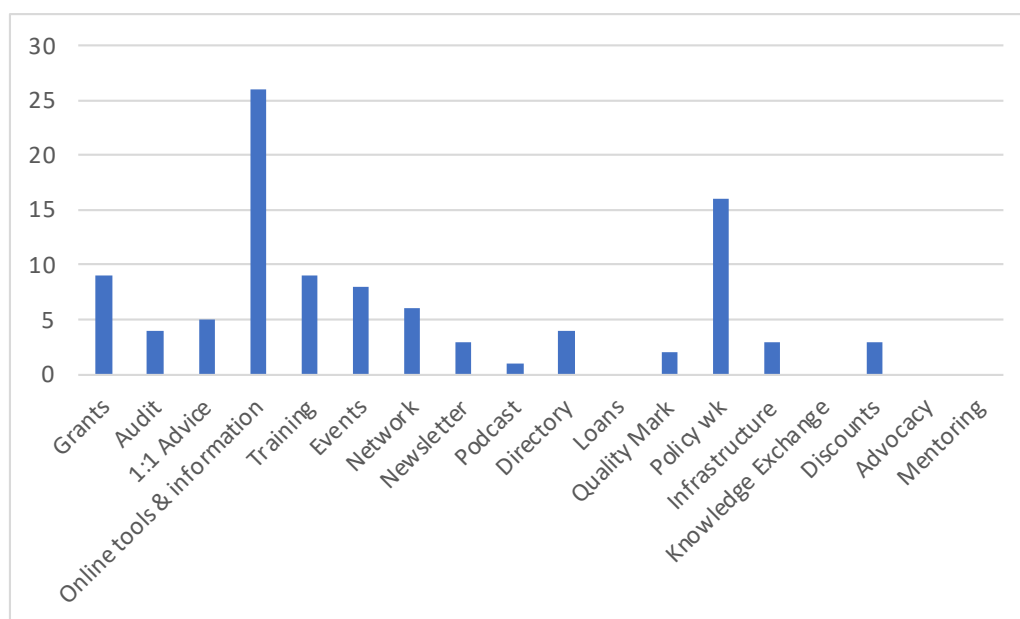


Figure 9 provides a breakdown of the types of interventions in the region. Nine programmes provided grants, four provided audits, and five interventions provided advice. The most popular intervention was signposting to online tools and information (26 programmes). Training was part of nine programmes, eight included events, six offered networking opportunities. Sixteen programmes in the region included policy work. No interventions in London involved loans, knowledge exchange, advocacy or mentoring.

Table 29: Providers of net zero support - London

Provider	Frequency
Arm's length body	3
Regional authority	7
Local authority	28
Private sector	1

In this region local authorities were overwhelmingly the most prevalent providers of support (28 programmes) followed by the Mayor of London (as the regional authority) (seven). Arm's length bodies provided three programmes, and surprisingly only one provider was from the private sector. Local authority provision is comparatively common in London.

Table 30: Funders of net zero support - London

Funder	Frequency
ERDF	1 *
Local authority	28
University	2
Mayor of London	3
Other	4

* but a substantial sum of £500m

Table 30 shows the various funders of net zero support within the region. Local authorities were the most prevalent funders by far (28 programmes), the Mayor of London funded three programmes, and two universities funded programmes. There was only one programme funded via the ERDF, but this amounted to £500m which was the biggest amount of programme funding that we identified in the research.

Table 31: Coverage of net zero support - London

Coverage	Frequency
Local	32
Regional	7

Table 31 provides information about the coverage of support in London. The picture here is one of a strong local focus. Most programmes (32) had local coverage, and seven programmes had regional coverage. We did not identify national programmes in London, possibly due to the geographical focus of the search terms.

Spotlight on Climate Essentials for Business, London Borough of Westminster
<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/support-schemes-businesses/climate-essentials-business>

Interventions offered:

- Grants
- Audits
- 1:1 advice
- Online tools
- Quality mark

Offered: Free to SMEs in Westminster

The London Borough of Westminster's Climate Essentials for Business programme supports businesses' journey to net zero with free resources and support, including: a simple online carbon footprint calculator and action planner; a report explaining the existing emissions of a business and a personalised reduction strategy; one-on-one assistance from independent experts; access to a community and additional resources, including funding. The key to the programme is for businesses to measure their carbon footprints with online tools as well as with one-to-one support. From there the business develops goals and a bespoke action plan which is updated after 12 months. Only 100 businesses can be supported during the trial period. Even though the programme was a trial it was an example of a comprehensive programme which included audit as central.

3.8 South East

Key Facts

8 LEPs	Oxfordshire, Solent, South East, Coast to Capital, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Thames Valley Berkshire, Enterprise M3
Number of Programmes:	36
Number of Interventions:	79
SME share:	17.51%
Interventions share:	13.46%
Programmes for SMEs ONLY	15
Programmes with >1 intervention:	23
Most extensive programme	East Sussex County Council Business Growth and Carbon Reduction Funding
Published investment	N/a (level of grants 11 programmes)
Pricing	34 Programmes = Free to SMEs

There are eight Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in the South East: Oxfordshire, Solent, South East, Coast to Capital, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Thames Valley Berkshire, and Enterprise M3. There were 36 programmes identified in this region, with 79 interventions. The South East is home to 17.51% of England’s SMEs, but the interventions share was 13.46% suggesting this region is underrepresented in net zero interventions per SME. Programmes targeted at SMEs amounted to 15, with 23 programmes having more than one intervention.

The most complete programme was the East Sussex County Council Business Growth and Carbon Reduction Funding. There were 34 programmes available to SMEs for free in the region.

Figure 10: Breakdown of intervention types – South East

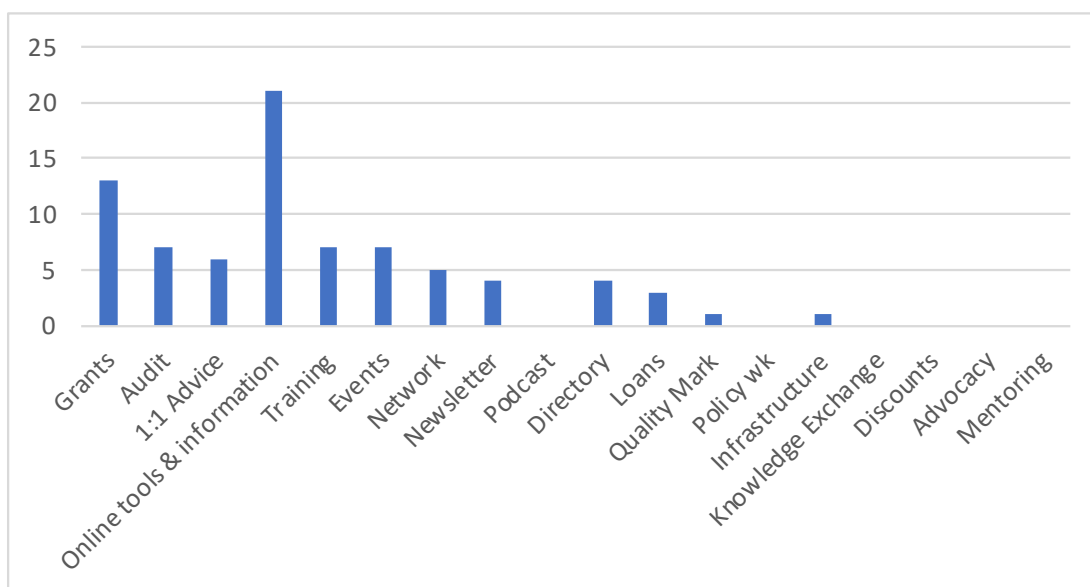


Figure 10 provides a breakdown of the types of interventions in the South East. Grants were well represented, with 13 programmes providing grants. Seven programmes provided audits, and six provided one-to-one advice. The most popular intervention (21) was signposting to online tools and information. Training was part of seven programmes and a further seven included events. Five programmes offered networking opportunities. Four had a newsletter and four a directory and three included loans. No interventions in the South East of England included podcasts, policy work, or discounts advocacy and mentoring.

Table 32: Coverage of net zero support - South East

Coverage	Frequency
Local	23
Regional	10
National	3

Table 32 illustrates the geographic scope of the South East of England’s net zero support programmes. Most programmes (23) had a local focus. Regional coverage was also significant, with ten programmes focused at this level. Three programmes were nationally focused.

Table 33: Providers of net zero support - South East

Providers	Frequency
Arm’s-length body	1
LEP	4
Local authority	10
Private sector	10
University	4
Third sector	3
CIC	3

Table 33 shows the range of providers of net zero support in the region. The most common providers were local authorities and the private sector (ten programmes each). These were followed by LEPs (programmes), universities (four), then the third sector (three) and Community Interest Corporations (CIC) with a further. One programme was provided by an arm’s length body. Relative to other areas private sector provision is common in the South East of England.

Table 34: Funders of net zero support - South East

Funder	Frequency
ERDF	11
Local authority	12
Chamber of Commerce	2
Fees	2
Bank	3
University	2
LEP	3
Other	1

Table 34 shows the spread of funders of net zero support within the South East. Local authorities were the most prevalent funders (12 programmes), followed by ERDF funding (11), the LEPs, (three), banks (three), the Chamber of Commerce (two), membership organisations which are funded by fees paid by their members (2) and universities (two programmes). There is a mix of funders in this region.

Table 35: Net zero support by LEP area - South East

LEP area	Frequency
Coast to Capital	11
Enterprise M3	2
Bucks	4
SEMLEP	1
OxLEP	2
SELEP	10

Table 35 shows the coverage of net zero support by LEP area. Programmes are concentrated in two LEP areas - Coast to Capital (11 programmes) and SELEP (ten programmes). Bucks Buckinghamshire has four programmes, the OXLEP area and Enterprise M3 both have two and SEMLEP has one programme.

Spotlight on East Sussex County Council Business Growth and Carbon Reduction Funding

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/support/grants/esi8/east-sussex-invest-8>

Interventions offered:

- Grants
- Loans
- 1:1 advice
- Online tools

Offered: To SMEs to support capital expenditure only

Capital expenditure items only are eligible for support through this programme, although that does include targeted consultancy. Businesses must demonstrate how they plan to reduce their carbon footprint.

The East Sussex Invest 8 fund is an East Sussex County Council (ESCC) programme that promotes long-term business growth in the county through capital investment in the form of grants and loans. East Sussex County Council delivers ESI 8 in collaboration with Locate East Sussex (LES).

The fund's major goals are to create local jobs and to help businesses become more ecologically responsible. Both must be shown on the application form and in the business plan.

There is a variety of information and guidance available, including signposting to a calculator tool on the Clean Growth UK website to determine where you should start: Clean Growth UK Net Zero 360.

Loans range from £10k to £100k and require a minimum of 50% match financing and a £450 (up to £25k) or £650 (for loans exceeding £25k) arrangement charge.

For grants ranging from £10k to £25k, grants are typically offered in combination with a loan. A 60% match is required. 50% is paid upon proof of grant and match spend, and 50% is paid when the new jobs have been filled for three months.

A new approved apprentice post is eligible for an additional £1.5k payment.

This is a programme focused on the capital expenditure of businesses and job creation in addition to the reductions in environmental impact. As such the policy tries to conflate several issues but that necessarily limits the numbers of firms gaining support. The fund is temporary closed to applications at present.

3.9 South West

Key Facts

6 LEPs	Gfirst, West of England, Swindon and Wiltshire, Dorset, Heart of the South West, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly
Number of Programmes:	37
Number of Interventions:	102
SME share:	11.15%
Interventions share:	17.38%
Programmes for SMEs ONLY	11
Programmes with >1 intervention:	26
Most extensive programme	Green Business Support, West of England Growth Hub
Published investment	£8.8m (3 interventions)
Pricing	35 Programmes = Free to SMEs

There are six Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in the South West: Gfirst, West of England, Swindon and Wiltshire, Dorset, Heart of the South West, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly. There were 37 programmes identified in this region, with 102 interventions. The South West hosts 11.15% of England's SMEs but the interventions share was 17.38% suggesting this region is very much over-represented in net zero interventions per SME. Programmes targeted at SMEs amounted to 11, and 26 programmes had more than one intervention. The most complete programme was Green Business Support from the West of England Growth Hub. There was evidence of £8.8m spending in the region from five programmes reporting figures. There were 35 programmes available to SMEs for free.

Figure 11: Breakdown of intervention types – South West

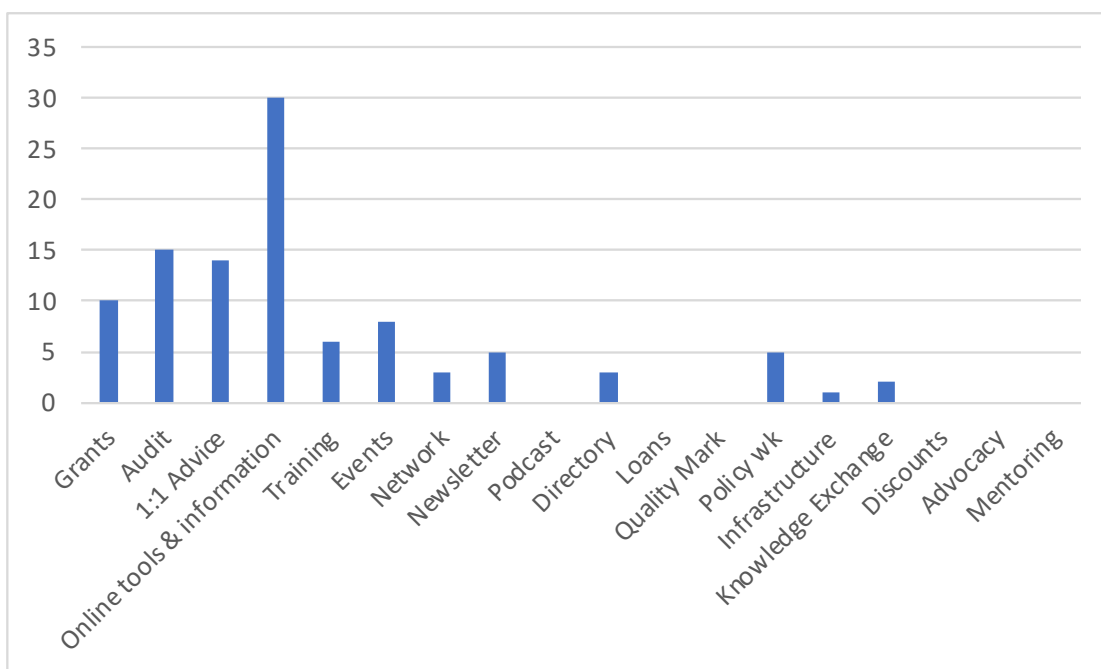


Figure 11 provides a breakdown of the types of interventions in the region. Grants were well represented, with ten programmes providing these. Fifteen programmes involved audits, and 14 provided advice. The most popular intervention was signposting to online tools and information (30 programmes). Training was part of six programmes and eight included events. Three programmes offered networking opportunities. Five had a newsletter and three a directory, five included policy work. One included infrastructure support and two included knowledge exchange. No programmes in the South West of England included podcasts, loans, quality marks, or discounts advocacy and mentoring.

Table 36: Funders of net zero support - South West

Funder	Frequency
Chambers of Commerce	2
ERDF	11
Government	2
Local authority	13
University	1
Other	5

Table 36 gives information about the various funders within the region. Local authorities were the most prevalent funders (13 programmes), followed by the ERDF (11 programmes), Chambers of Commerce (two), government organisations (two) and universities (one). There were several various funders classified as other (five).

Table 37: Providers of net zero support - South West

Providers	Frequency
Arm’s-length body	3
Charity	1
Chamber of Commerce	2
LEP	2
Local authority	13
Private sector	9
Third sector	3
University	2
Government	1
other	1

Table 37 shows the variety of providers of net zero support in the region. The local authorities were the most prevalent providers (13 programmes) followed by the private sector (nine). Third sector organisations and arm’s length bodies provided three programmes each. The

Chambers of Commerce, LEPs and universities provided two programmes each. One programme was provided by a government body. Private sector provision is relatively common in the South West of England.

Table 38: Coverage of net zero support - South West

Coverge	Frequency
Local	25
Regional	8
National	4

Table 38 provides information about the coverage or geographic scope of programmes in the region. This shows that most programmes (25) have a local focus. Eight programmes had regional level coverage, and four were pitched at national level. Again, the local focus is dominant in this region.

Table 39: Coverage of net zero support by LEP area - South West

LEP area	Frequency
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	6
Dorset	1
GFirst	5
Heart of the South West	12
West of England	7
Swindon and Wiltshire	1

Table 39 shows the coverage of net zero support by LEP area within the region. It shows that the Heart of the South West area has the most programmes, (12), followed by the West of England (seven programmes), and then Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (six) and GFirst (five). Dorset and Swindon and Wiltshire have one programme each.

Spotlight on Green Business Support from the West of England Growth Hub

<https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/growth-hub/green-business-support/>

Interventions offered:

- Grants
- Audits
- 1:1 advice
- Online tools
- Networks
- Events
- Newsletter
- Directory

Offered: To SMEs in the West of England Combined Authority

The Green Business Support programme in the West of England aims to take businesses on a step-by-step through a net Zero journey. It takes businesses through an eight-step journey from building a plan at step one through to attending events at step two. In subsequent steps the firm will measure, get support and take action.

3.10 England-wide programmes

Key Facts

Number of Programmes:	54
Number of Interventions:	132
SME share:	n/a
Interventions share:	n/a
Programmes for SMEs ONLY	17
Programmes with >1 intervention:	36
Most extensive programme	UK Business Climate Hub
Published investment	N/A
Pricing	30 Programmes = Free to SMEs

The research identified 54 programmes operating England-wide, with 132 interventions. Programmes targeted at SMEs only amounted to 17, with 36 programmes having more than one intervention. The most complete programme was the UK Business Climate Hub. There were 30 programmes that were available to SMEs for free.

Figure 12: Breakdown of intervention types – England-wide

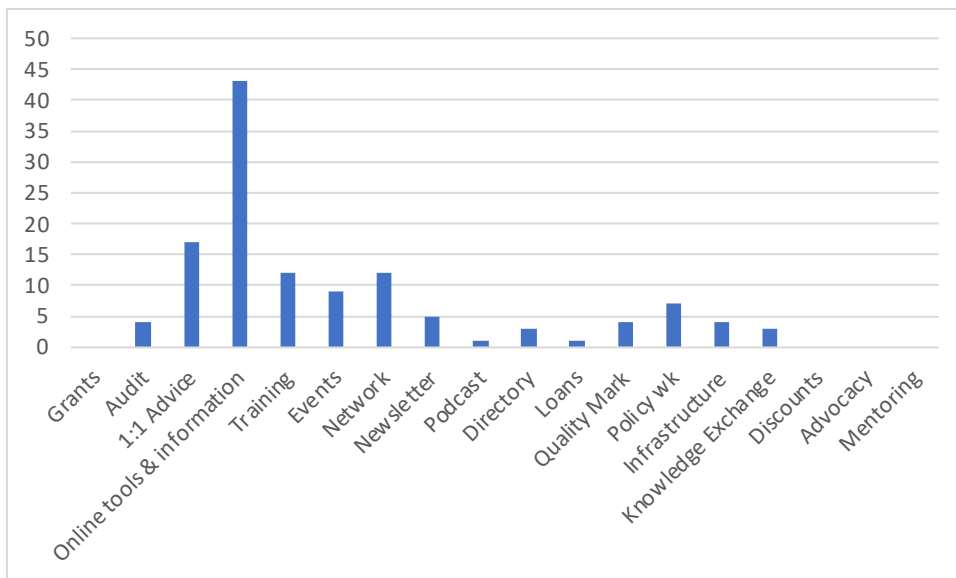


Figure 12 illustrates the breakdown of interventions England-wide. The first point to note is the absence of grants. Three England-wide programmes provided some type of auditing service, assessing and evaluating an organisation's sustainability or environmental performance. More popular was personalised one-to-one advice, provided by 14 programmes. The highest frequency (37) was for provision of online tools and information. Ten programmes offered training designed to increase knowledge, skills, or capacity within businesses. Seven programmes offered events, and nine offered networking. Four programmes provided a newsletter, and two programmes included a directory. One programme provided financial support in the form of loans or other funding options. One programme contained a quality mark, which could be a certification or acknowledgment recognising a specific standard or level of success. Four programmes contained policy-related events or interactions, such as policy workshops or advocacy efforts. Six programmes provided infrastructure support. Three programmes aimed to foster knowledge exchange. No programmes included discounts, advocacy or mentoring.

Table 40: Providers of net zero support - England-wide

Providers	Frequency
Arm's-length	2
Bank	1
Private sector	36
University	1
Third sector	11

Table 40 shows the types of providers of net zero support England-wide. There were 36 providers from the private sector. Ten suppliers fell into the third sector group. One bank was identified as a provider and one university. Universities frequently strive for a regional or local reach rather than national, so this is not surprising.

Overall, the research revealed the multi-stakeholder nature of net zero support funding in England. It showed the participation of banks, private sector firms, universities, and third-sector organisations, emphasising the combined effort from all sectors to accelerate the transition to a sustainable, carbon-neutral future. The UK government has invested in initiatives such as the Net Zero Innovation Portfolio and the Green Industrial Revolution Challenge Fund. Private investors, including venture capital firms, impact investors, and corporate sustainability funds, also contribute to the funding of net zero initiatives. Collaboration with philanthropic foundations and public-private partnerships may also result in further funding. There are no consistent funders at national level as we found for the regions.

Spotlight on UK Business Climate Hub

<https://businessclimatehub.uk>

Interventions offered:

- Online tools
- Signposting to grants
- Events

The UK Business Climate Hub also aims to take businesses step-by-step through a net zero journey. The Hub is Government backed/supported, developed with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), the SME Climate Hub and the UK's main business organisations, energy networks, high street banks and professional bodies. It has an impressive cast list of supporters. They provide support through an online series of tools and 'how to' guides and provide a scaffold for a business who is independently going through the net zero journey. The programme encourages businesses to increase their understanding of net zero. It has links to funding where the businesses may be eligible for grant support and in this way can provide an information hub.

It also links to the Climate Hub to make a commitment to net zero. In this way it follows the Climate Hub assumption that the business will be more likely to take action if it has made a public commitment to achieving net zero. It is aimed at a wide variety of businesses from all sectors. It has case studies of net zero reduction from taxis going electric to farmers becoming net zero.

3.11 Conclusion

The regional analysis of net zero support for SMEs highlighted the variation in provision across regions. In general, the proportion of interventions was consistent with the proportion of SMEs in each region. Nonetheless, The South West and West Midlands had more interventions than

warranted by the proportions of SMEs they had in the population, as did the North East. The relative importance of manufacturing in the West Midlands may be one reason for the provision profile here. More variation can be seen between LEP areas. For example, several LEP areas were represented by one programme including Tees Valley, Cheshire, Dorset, and others (although this might not necessarily indicate poor provision where there is a well-funded, large programme in place).

There were a variety of exemplar programmes identified which offered a variety of interventions. The exemplars were picked to illustrate the combination of interventions in a programme. The Coventry and Warwickshire programme for example comprised of nine different interventions. The Green Business Support from the West of England Growth Hub had eight.

The regional analysis revealed two significant issues. Firstly, it was observed that **the number of recipients benefiting from the exemplar programmes often accounted for less than 1% of the total SME population**. This finding raises concerns about the reach and accessibility of these programmes, as a vast majority of SMEs are potentially not being adequately supported in their net zero journey.

Secondly, **there is a lack of clarity regarding the design of interventions and a lack of available evidence on their effectiveness**. It is essential to understand how these programmes are structured, the methodologies employed, and the evidence base behind them to ensure that the interventions provided are impactful and yield the desired outcomes. Addressing these issues is crucial to ensuring that net zero support programmes are comprehensive, inclusive, and evidence-based, allowing a broader spectrum of SMEs to actively participate and contribute to the transition towards a sustainable future.

4. DISCUSSION

In this chapter we discuss the issues that emerged from the research around the structure of the net zero support provision for SMEs. We then move on to present a taxonomy of interventions and a reverse logic model to understand the evidence needed to understand the effectiveness of the programmes.

4.1 Structure of provision

The research found that across England, a significant number of comprehensive programmes addressing climate change are in place. These programmes aim to equip SMEs with the necessary tools, resources, and support to minimise their carbon footprint and implement sustainable practices. Certain regions, such as the South West and West Midlands, exhibited a higher proportion of interventions relative to their SME population. This might indicate a greater emphasis on supporting SMEs in their net zero transformation in these areas.

While numerous programmes are available, however, it is important to acknowledge that some regions have limited provisions in place. This discrepancy raises questions about the accessibility of support for SMEs. It is crucial to address these disparities and ensure equal opportunities for small businesses across the country. Moreover, there are concerns about the accessibility and reach of these programmes in general when the extent of the climate challenge is taken into account, as the number of recipients of exemplar programmes comprises less than 1% of the total SME population. This highlights the need to ensure equal opportunities for SMEs across the country to actively participate in achieving net-zero emissions.

Additionally, **the dynamic nature of funding necessitates an awareness of the changing landscape of net zero support programmes for small enterprises**, with new programmes emerging and existing ones concluding. Here, the study highlights a recurring issue within the small business support system, which is fragmentation. The presence of 282 separate programmes dedicated to assisting SMEs on their net zero journey reflects a potentially disjointed ecosystem with multiple initiatives operating independently.

The sheer number of programmes indicates a lack of centralisation and coordination. This fragmentation may pose challenges for SMEs seeking assistance. The multitude of programmes available can lead to confusion and difficulty navigating the available options. Moreover, the lack of a cohesive approach may result in duplicated effort, inefficiencies, and

inconsistencies in the support provided. One example of these inefficiencies is the sheer number of different carbon calculators that are available and signed off by different programmes.

Addressing this fragmentation is crucial to ensuring that SMEs receive effective and efficient assistance on their path to net zero, and that they have confidence in the support on offer. Centralising and harmonising existing programmes can result in a more coherent and streamlined support system. By establishing clearer guidelines, simplifying application processes, and strengthening communication channels, the support system can become more accessible and user-friendly for small businesses.

Promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing among the various programmes and providers can further enhance the effectiveness of the support provided. Creating networks and platforms where programme managers can share best practices and resources and collaborate on initiatives can help alleviate fragmentation. This collaborative approach would foster a more holistic and integrated support structure, ensuring that SMEs receive consistent and comprehensive assistance throughout their net zero journey.

Overall, the analysis underscores the importance of supporting SMEs on their net zero journey and highlights the need for equal distribution of support across but also within regions. Addressing fragmentation, enhancing accessibility, and promoting collaboration are essential steps to ensuring effective and efficient assistance for SMEs.

4.2 A taxonomy of interventions

One of the aims of the research was to try to develop a taxonomy of the main types of net zero business support interventions. This is something which has been done before for general business support, where ‘light-touch’ approaches were distinguished from more comprehensive interventions (e.g. Mole, Hart et al. 2011). In the case of net zero, it is noteworthy that 100% of grant intervention programmes included additional interventions, such as audits (34%), one-on-one advice (31%), and online support and information (45%). Consequently, interventions are not independent but can be grouped into patterns.

This section outlines three such patterns. These are classified as ‘grant-based’, ‘comprehensive audit-based’, and ‘light-touch audit-based’. These types highlight the major choices made when developing interventions. Programmes can support the businesses with

grants directly, which is likely to be expensive and therefore narrows down the number of firms can receive help. Many programmes incorporated some kind of audit.

Grant-based support

The first type of support offers grants for firms to develop their net zero transformation. It starts with an environmental audit, which provides significant insights into a company's present carbon footprint and identifies possibilities for development. Face-to-face help is also available, allowing businesses to interact with professionals who can guide them through the transition. Furthermore, small businesses are directed to online resources, ensuring that they have access to essential information and tools. A networking organisation enables collaboration and knowledge sharing, while training and events are organised to educate firms on sustainable practices. Furthermore, access to grant funds or one-to-one help is conditional on completing an initial assessment ensuring targeted assistance aligned with identified needs.

Target 2030 is a Severn Wye energy efficiency initiative based in the counties of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire that aims to help small and medium-sized businesses identify and reduce their energy expenses and environmental impact by implementing energy efficiency solutions. The programme provides a one-to-one adviser who produces a free site survey, report, and presentation that analyses how the company utilises energy. The survey recommends energy-saving techniques that are free, low-cost, or capital-intensive and are supported by grants covering 30% of the costs - see <https://target2030.co.uk/>. The BEST programme in the North East of England is another example of this type of grant-based provision (see Chapter 3).

Comprehensive audit-based

The second type of net zero business support we identify has a similar structure but does not include grants. While still providing an environmental assessment, face-to-face guidance, referrals to online resources, training, events, and networking, the lack of grant funding shifts the focus to other forms of assistance. Online networks are introduced, offering small firms with virtual platforms for networking with like-minded organisations and remotely obtaining resources and help.

The Net Zero Accelerator was a project of free and intense support offered by The Business Village throughout 2022, created particularly for 36 innovative enterprises in the Barnsley region with high-impact potential for contributing to net zero carbon emission targets. A dedicated business coach provided one-on-one help and coaching to businesses.

Business owners attended free customised workshops where they received the most recent professional information. They collaborated with like-minded businesses. The UK Government funded the project in part through the UK Community Renewal Fund, together with three other projects supported by Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council and delivered by the Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber of Commerce (see <https://www.business-village.co.uk/net-zero-accelerator/>).

Light-touch audit-based

The third type of support, like the others, begins with an environmental audit, which allows businesses to calculate their carbon footprint. However, it goes beyond the initial audit and includes additional one-to-one assistance. This individualised assistance is tailored to the specific needs and concerns of each small business. Firms are referred to relevant resources, such as online tools, guidance, and information, in addition to one-on-one assistance. It is 'light-touch' because the programmes involve fewer hours of individualised support, and so are less intensive. Since January 2022, the Smarter Energy NEL service has helped 121 local businesses save £182,000 per year. Local businesses benefit from a low-carbon business advisor, who is an expert in business sustainability and has provided targeted support and technical guidance. The initiative includes an energy audit and decarbonisation strategies, as well as links to online resources (see <https://e-factorbusiness.co.uk/smarter-energy-nel/>).

Overall, net zero business support in England demonstrates a variety of ways to assist small firms on their road to sustainability. The three approaches we have identified encapsulate the main different styles of support. All require an environmental audit either to support the grant or to act as the basis of a plan. Consequently, the importance of having a consistent approach to doing environmental audits, and the capacity within England to support and help companies to develop their environmental auditing skills becomes a serious pinch point for moving towards net zero.

4.3 Assessing programmes through logic model re-engineering

In policy creation and programme evaluation, a logic model is a visual representation or framework that depicts the logical linkages between programme inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. It serves as a guide for understanding and communicating how a programme or policy is anticipated to function and achieve its goals.

The main components of a logic model include:

1. **Inputs:** Project or policy resources such as funds, personnel, equipment, or collaborations.
2. **Activities:** The precise acts and processes that are used to carry out the programme. Services, interventions, training, workshops, and public awareness campaigns are examples of interventions.
3. **Outputs:** Outputs are the activity's direct products or deliverables. They can be quantified, such as the number of people reached, the amount of goods delivered, or the services provided.
4. **Outcomes:** Outcomes are the intended changes or outcomes because of the training. They could be of the short, medium, or long-term variety. Short-term outcomes are frequently changes in the knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours of individuals or groups directly touched by the initiative. Long-term outcomes represent broader societal or systemic changes, whereas intermediate outcomes reflect changes at the organisational or community level.
5. **Impacts:** Impacts are the long-term consequences or advantages of a project or programme. They frequently correspond to the initiative's general goals and objectives. Since the effects may be difficult to quantify, long-term monitoring is required to detect major changes.

A logic model supports policymakers and programme architects in defining the logical linkages between components, providing a better understanding of how inputs, actions, and outcomes interact. It also communicates the programme's theory of change to stakeholders, funders, and the public by visualising the desired relationships and consequences.

4.3.1 Reverse engineering a logic model

Working backward from a set of operations to reveal the model's essential components is termed a 'reverse engineering' a logic model. We do this to create a set of hypotheses which might enable us to understand logical statements or assumptions. These assumptions serve as the foundation for understanding how the programme's efforts result in the desired results:

1. Investigate activities and outcomes: Begin by reviewing the actions and outputs stated in the programme. Recognise the unique nature of each action and the consequences it produces. For example, the use of events can serve to publicise a programme and attract interested parties. Events might have other consequences too including enabling like-minded people to meet.
2. Identify potential hypotheses: Consider how the activity's outcomes can help achieve the objectives. In the outcomes, look for logical connections and causation between the projected changes or consequences. For example, environmental audits can highlight the areas where the firm is having most impact on the environment.
3. Develop hypotheses: Using the identified linkages, develop a set of hypotheses that explain how the activities and outputs will lead to the intended outcomes. These hypotheses should be tested and express the hypothesised cause-and-effect linkages unambiguously. If-then statements can be helpful: If-then sentences can be used to show conditional relationships in your hypotheses. For example, if the programme provides net zero workshops to businesses, then their access to information will improve, resulting in better action.
4. This stimulus-response approach can be modified by taking into account contextual factors. We might argue that the environmental audit, if supported by appropriate one-to-one advice, can cause the business to take net zero actions if the business has the capabilities and the resources available to support them. Hence it takes into account any contextual circumstances that may modify the linkages between activities, outputs, and outcomes. The target population, external influences, resource availability, and cultural challenges are examples of such elements.
5. Assess the consequences: Finally, assess the programme's long-term objectives. Long-term advantages or disadvantages for individuals, groups, or systems. They are often linked to the programme's overarching aims and objectives. It might be for example, that the longer-term implications of the net zero programme may enable businesses to develop a set of procedures to adopt new practices that may generalise to other areas of the business. It may be that the net zero experience shows businesses that they can act on advice from outside the business.

We now reverse engineer the **Green Scene Manchester** Chamber of Commerce programme to show how it might be possible to understand how the programme can be assessed. The key ideas in the Green Scene programme are 'collaboration' and 'community'.

The Green Scene offers the following interventions.

- Audit
- One-to-one advice
- Online tools and information
- Training and events
- Networking
- Newsletter

Activities	Outputs	Hypotheses	Research Evidence
Audit	Number of audits conducted	If businesses know where they are generating environmental impacts, then this can act as a pre-requisite to act	There is little evidence that ‘what gets measured, gets managed’ although measurement may be helpful for subsequent action. Measurement by itself is not a strategy for energising the company. Measurements instead provide help for issues that are already significant within the organisation.(e.g. Catasús, Ersson et al. 2007). Thus, audits may be an aid to subsequent action.
1:1 Advice	Number of hours of advice	If businesses have support to develop action plans, then they are more likely to develop and follow them	There is evidence on the effectiveness of advice-taking by CEOs (e.g. Vestal and Guidice 2019). There is evidence in favour of action planning within entrepreneurship. For example, starting a new firm, requires action planning in addition to goal intentions (Gielnik, Barabas et al. 2014).
Online tools and information	n/a	If they are clear in their search businesses can access information and find solutions online.	Survey evidence shows online information to be an important source for net zero (e.g. Kesidou and Ri 2021).
Training and Events	Number of training and events provided	Businesses need to understand the techniques and approaches to develop internal net zero policies	The evidence on training alone as an impact on behaviour in small firms has been equivocal (Storey 2004). There is evidence that training improves firm outcomes both in developed and developing countries (Camuffo, Cordova et al. 2020, McKenzie 2021, Kotha, Vissa et al. 2023)
Networking	Probably difficult to collect	Businesses learn well from each other	There is evidence to support peer learning (e.g., Kuhn and Galloway 2015, Chatterji, Delecourt et al. 2019, Hasan and Koning 2019). It is more difficult to control the extent to which peer learning takes place. Much of the literature has measured when it has taken place rather than designing peer learning interventions although action learning sets which aim to bring groups together have had some success (Ram and Trehan 2010).
Peer-to-peer led interventions	Probably difficult to collect	In the context of the Chamber, it is likely that members will include firms delivering net zero expertise	This is more difficult to evidence. In the context of virtual communities in within health findings are inconclusive (Eysenbach, Powell et al. 2004). There are benefits for scaling up support through this process which needs more research. Evidence from changes within firms does suggest that top-down approaches which are followed up by peer led approaches can be effective (Parke, Tangirala et al. 2021)

The hypotheses underlying the Green Scene can be divided into two main parts. Firstly, there is an integrated programme of net zero interventions, which includes audits, personalised advice, training, and online tools. When these elements are combined, they are partially supported by research evidence (Mole, Hart et al. 2011). However, it is important to note that environmental audits and training alone have less robust support in the literature. The utilisation of action plans derived from personalised support facilitates businesses in adapting information to their specific circumstances, and evidence suggests that peer learning can enhance the effectiveness of these plans. Secondly, the objective is to establish a sustainable community that fosters ongoing efforts towards achieving net zero. This may necessitate the programme's ability to cultivate absorptive capacity within participating firms, enabling them to set targets and develop net zero policies that will sustain their journey towards carbon neutrality. Assessing the extent to which this goal has been accomplished will require a long-term evaluation, but currently, there is limited evidence available to support these aspects.

The hypotheses underlying the Green Scene programme can be categorised into two main parts, each with its own unique elements:

A) Integrated programme of net zero interventions:

The Green Scene programme offers a comprehensive toolbox filled with net zero interventions. These interventions include environmental audits, personalised advice, training sessions, and online tools. When combined, these elements work together to support businesses in their journey towards achieving net zero emissions.

Consider a local restaurant participating in the Green Scene programme. The programme starts with an environment audit, where experts assess the restaurant's energy usage, waste management practises, and carbon footprint. While measurement may not produce action on its own, based on the audit findings, personalised advice can be provided to the restaurant owner on energy-efficient equipment, waste reduction strategies, and sustainable sourcing options. The restaurant staff may then attend training sessions to learn about sustainable practices and how to implement them effectively. Online tools are also available, offering resources and calculators to monitor and track progress towards net zero goals. The evidence suggests that these tools may work individually but some also supports more intensive interventions within businesses.

When these interventions are combined, they are partially supported by research evidence (Mole, Hart et al. 2011). However, it is important to note that environmental audits and training

alone have less robust support in the literature. The utilisation of action plans derived from personalised support facilitates businesses in adapting information to their specific circumstances, and evidence suggests that peer learning can enhance the effectiveness of these plans (Chatterji, Delecourt et al. 2019).

B) Cultivating a sustainable community

The Green Scene programme aims to establish a sustainable community where ongoing efforts towards achieving net zero are fostered. This involves creating an environment that encourages participating businesses to adopt long-term sustainability practices.

Consider a group of small businesses in a shared office space that are part of the Green Scene programme. The programme facilitates peer learning sessions where these businesses can exchange ideas, share best practices, and learn from one another's experiences. Through this collaboration, they develop a collective understanding of sustainable practices and set ambitious targets for reducing their carbon footprint. The programme also provides ongoing support and resources to help these businesses implement net zero policies and practices effectively.

One key aspect is building absorptive capacity within these businesses, enabling them to set targets and develop net zero policies that will sustain their carbon neutrality journey (Cepeda-Carrion, Cegarra-Navarro et al. 2012, van Doorn, Heyden et al. 2016). In this sense the carbon neutrality journey is more like a stairway rather than an on-off shift in perspective which suggests on-going intervention.

While the integrated programme of net zero interventions has some research support, further evidence is needed to fully validate its effectiveness. Similarly, evaluating the establishment of a sustainable community and its absorptive capacity requires long-term assessment, and limited evidence is currently available in these areas. Nonetheless, by presenting the hypotheses in a clearer and visually engaging way, we can enhance the understanding and readability of the Green Scene programme's underlying concepts.

In summary, the net zero business support taxonomies we have developed show three approaches to support for small businesses. Reverse engineering a logic model helps policymakers and programme architects understand the logical relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts, ultimately guiding the development of more effective and sustainable programmes in the future.

5. CONCLUSION

Our research found a considerable number (282) programmes aimed at supporting businesses in England with their net zero transition. The taxonomies we developed demonstrate the variety of ways to assist small businesses on their path towards sustainability.

Overall, there are plenty of programmes, but more problematic is the extent of their reach into the small business community. Let's take a look at the spotlight programmes we identified. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) provided £670,000 to the BEST programme as part of the 2014–2020 European Structural and Investment Fund Growth Programme. To achieve its goals, this project successfully completed over 200 energy audits. Nottingham Trent University implemented the Sustainability in Enterprise programme, which was critical in assisting 218 SMEs in Greater Nottingham on their road to net zero between 2021 and 2023. Over a seven-year period, the Coventry and Warwickshire Green Business Programme has aided 400 businesses. Groundwork East's Carbon Charter, in conjunction with the Environment Agency and Suffolk County Council, provided small and medium-sized enterprises with assistance, support, and recognition as they try to achieve net zero. More than 500 businesses have received the Carbon Charter since its founding, demonstrating their commitment to sustainable practices. Finally, the London Borough of Westminster's Climate Essentials for Business is currently in a trial phase, with help limited to 100 enterprises. **These exemplar programmes together have assisted 1,418 businesses; but 1,418 businesses represent a drop in the ocean when it comes to the scale of the net zero challenge.**

Making assessments of the impact of interventions is essential to delivering effective programmes going forward. This research found a lack of available evaluation information on net zero support. A logic model is a visual framework that explains the logical linkages between programme inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. It guides policymakers and programme architects in understanding and communicating the programme's goals. We 'reverse engineered' logic models to determine activities, outcomes, and hypotheses to understand relationships. A fair and consistent logic model is crucial for net zero business support implementation and to help policymakers and programme architects understand the impact of initiatives.

This study has also revealed the fragmentation within the system that supports small enterprises on their net zero path. The presence of multiple independent programmes might

pose difficulties for SMEs, such as confusion and inefficiency. To provide SMEs with effective and streamlined assistance, it is critical to address this issue by centralising and harmonising the support system, as well as encouraging collaboration among programme administrators. In this way, small businesses may be empowered to contribute to the country's net zero ambitions in a more efficient and coordinated manner.

5.1 Recommendations

There is a significant disparity between the number of firms currently engaged in the net zero journey and the pressing need businesses to cut their carbon emissions.

While existing support initiatives have made commendable strides in assisting SMEs on their sustainability path, it is evident that a yawning gap remains between the current level of engagement and the broader imperative of achieving net zero across all sectors of the economy. To bridge this gap, it is crucial to accelerate efforts and encourage widespread adoption of sustainable practices so net zero becomes the norm rather than the exception. This necessitates a comprehensive and coordinated approach involving policy frameworks, financial incentives, and robust support mechanisms that empower businesses of all sizes to embrace the transition to a low-carbon future. This is all the more important given the termination of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funded programmes making this stocktake of provision timely. At the same time, this highlights the need for future research to cover the period when the replacement funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is in place. The specific recommendations from this research are as follows:

The UK Government should simplify the English business support landscape for net zero support, making it easier for businesses of different sizes to navigate, whilst maintaining the connection to local support. This could be achieved by establishing one business support brand across England, e.g., Business England. More broadly, the Government will play a critical role in providing coordination and stewardship to bring together the many actors involved in net zero support.

Local authorities should consult with a diverse range of local businesses when designing programmes on net zero to ensure that the needs of all businesses are met and that they are able to see benefit from programmes. Understanding specific business needs will be important to ensure that all businesses are motivated to participate in programmes and that they are able to make tangible changes to their businesses.

Local authorities should share more information about net zero support programmes with neighbouring local authorities and allow them to participate. This will ensure that regions are able to provide more comprehensive offerings to businesses. The termination of EDRF has led to the closure of many programmes and there exists a striking variation in programmes across regions. Council collaboration should help address this, avoid duplication, and create a more level playing field across regions. The latter point is particularly important for businesses based in rural parts of the country, where programme consolidation has occurred inconsistently.

Local authorities should - where possible - offer businesses a combination of an audits and grants. Audits provide clarity over the required steps which are tailored to specific needs. For most small businesses, lengthy and uncertain return on investment, lack of capital and inability to access affordable finance are major barriers. Evidence demonstrates that grants encourage greater participation and help overcome the financial barrier many businesses face in the transition to net zero.

Programmes – where possible – should aim to offer one-to-one support from an adviser who understands the challenges and constraints of running a small business. Having one-to-one support constitutes an important component of a programme that can provide an additional level of confidence in firms to transition towards net zero. Advisors can play an important role in providing support when designing an action plan.

The research supports the introduction of a “Help to Green” scheme to boost SME investment in net zero. FSB welcomed news that the Government will pilot a new audit and grant scheme which will enable small businesses to implement measures to become more energy efficient. The Review of Net Zero endorsed Help to Green. The scheme would include an online hub of practical information on how to reduce energy usage and environmental impact and a voucher/grant scheme, with a value of up to £5,000 a time, which would make a grant contribution to investing in low emission transport solutions, sustainable manufacturing, energy efficiency or microgeneration.

We recommend a separate assessment of past and current net zero initiatives to fully understand their advantages and cost-effectiveness. The evaluation should focus on the actual results achieved by these initiatives, not just their activities. A thorough analysis will help develop better tailored programmes in the future and allow local authorities to adjust to the changing business landscape. This analysis should be accompanied by an impact statement that outlines the achievements of programmes.

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APPENDIX

Appendix1: Methodology

The data collection has been undertaken in two phases. The time frame for data collection was January – May 2023.

A.1 Phase 1 - Survey

A light touch email survey circulated to FSB stakeholders including regional officers. The survey questions were:

1. In your area are you aware of programmes to help small businesses with a transition to net zero (energy efficiency, environmental audits, carbon footprint reduction)? Please list as many as come to mind. They might be offered through LEPs or through local authorities or from charities.
2. Of these programmes are you aware of support programmes that you deem to be successful (in terms of take-up or reputation with business)?
3. Are you aware of programmes which are not focused on net zero but which nevertheless have positive outcomes on aspects such as energy efficiency or will as a by-product reduce the carbon footprint.

Responses from the FSB Development Managers were collected into the dataset and cross referenced against desk-based research findings in Phase 2. Insights drawn from the responses are included in the data findings and analysis.

A.2 Phase 2 – Desk based research

An extensive web-based search exercise for interventions, focused through Local and District Authority areas in England, was undertaken. Additionally, national programmes and on-line only resources were collected, and signposting provided by organisations such as Growth Hubs, LEPs and Universities were followed. Where one intervention offered signposting to further interventions, whether in the same geographical area or not, these were followed up and assessed against the criteria for inclusion.

The data was collected systematically using consistent search terms for web-based research and structured data headings for the collection process.

Using input from the email survey responses, search terms were generated. Search terms and signposted interventions were recorded during the data collection.

A.2.1 Data Collection Headings

Provider & Programme Details	Types of Support/Interventions	Other
Provider	Grants & Value	Target businesses
Name of Programme	Audit	Eligibility Criteria
Funder & Programme Value	1:1 Advice	Date Accessed
Evidence of Success	Online tools & information	Search term
Pricing model	Training & Events	
Application Process	Network	
Type of Provider	Newsletter	
Provider Location	Podcast	
Partner Organisations	Directory	
Scale	Loans	
Geographic Region	Quality Mark	
LEP	Policy	
Start /End	Infrastructure	
Website, Twitter, Contact	Knowledge Exchange	
	Discounts	
	Advocacy	
	Mentoring	

Although the searches were focused through Local Authority geographic levels, the data was mapped to both Net Zero Hub regions and Local Economic Partnerships to give a sense of coverage throughout England.

A.2.2 Search Terms

Coventry City Council small business support for net zero
 EM3 – Hampshire and Surrey Resource / Energy Efficiency Grants
 Email from FSB Regional Officers
 From Email request
 green support for SMEs Midlands
 green support for SMEs south east
<https://zerocarbonbusiness.uk/find-support-and-funding/>
<https://greentechsouth.com/>
 Linked from Sustainability West Midlands
 Low Carbon Business Support Project Doncaster
 Low Carbon Business Support Project Sheffield Council
 Mayor’s Small Business Energy Efficiency Fund
 net zero sme support birmingham
 net zero sme support Blackburn
 net zero SME support Bristol
 net zero SME support Cornwall
 net zero sme support Coventry
 net zero SME support Cumbria
 net zero SME support Devon
 net zero sme support Durham
 net zero SME support Essex
 net zero SME support Gloucester
 net zero sme support Gloucestershire
 net zero sme support Hampshire
 net zero SME support Lancashire

net zero sme support Leicestershire
 net zero sme support Lincolnshire
 net zero sme support Liverpool
 net zero sme support Manchester
 net zero sme support Milton Keynes
 net zero SME support Newcastle
 net zero SME support Norfolk
 net zero SME support north west England
 net zero sme support Northampton
 net zero sme support Northamptonshire
 net zero sme support Nottingham
 net zero sme support Oxfordshire
 net zero sme support Sheffield
 net zero sme support Shropshire
 net zero sme support Somerset
 net zero sme support south Cambridgeshire.
 net zero sme support Staffordshire
 net zero SME support Suffolk
 net zero sme support surrey
 net zero sme support Tees Valley
 net zero sme support west Yorkshire.
 net Zero SME support Wiltshire
 net zero sme support Worcestershire
 net zero sme support Yorkshire
 Royal Borough Kingston net zero business
 Signposted from another provider.

A.2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Incorporating the decision to focus only on specific or targeted interventions, the following general principles were applied:

- Programmes which provided support to more than one type of organisation (e.g., small and large businesses, businesses including SMEs and public sector organisations) were generally included as long as it was explicit that SMEs were an intended beneficiary.
- Programmes must have included at least one dedicated intervention.
- General business support was excluded.
- General business support with a minimal reference to net zero or sustainability was excluded.
- Listings which were very basic signposting repeated in other places were excluded.
- Programmes that focused on innovation and development solutions were excluded.



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