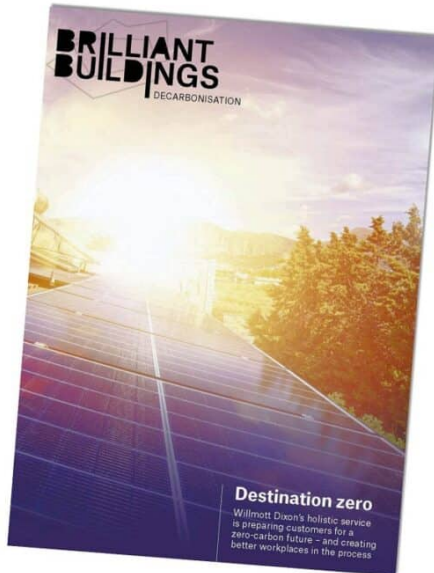


“Councils may struggle to keep the lights on with inefficient buildings”

3 years ago



Major research of UK councils saw nearly half of councillors admit that unless work is done to retrofit and decarbonise their building stock, utility bills will become un-affordable.

More than two fifths of councils have warned they will be unable to pay their energy bills unless work is carried out on many of their buildings to make them more energy efficient, new polling has revealed.

The research shows that 44% of councillors admit that unless work is done to retrofit and decarbonise their building stock, utility bills will soon become unaffordable. Some 15% have even warned that their public buildings would become unusable.

The polling*, on behalf of construction company [Willmott Dixon](#), also reveals that more than four in five (82%) councillors in England say their local authority has a plan in place for delivering on their net zero commitment.

However, councillors acknowledged that there are several challenges to retrofitting and decarbonising their public building stock, with more than half (58%) of councillors concerned that scaling up efforts to decarbonise and retrofit their public building stock is being impacted by budget shortfalls. Almost half (48%) also cited that the scale of the challenge is a barrier.

Recent analysis by the Local Government Association (LGA) suggest councils will face a £3.4 billion funding gap in 2023-24, rising to £4.5 billion in 2024-25.

The Government has estimated that the cost of decarbonising UK public sector buildings is estimated to be £25-30 billion. Without this investment, the UK will fail to meet its aim of net zero emissions by 2050.

Almost a third (30%) of councillors rank retrofitting and decarbonising existing buildings as their top priority for low carbon infrastructure projects. But the polling reveals that more than half of councillors (56%) do not know what their council's budget is for retrofitting and decarbonising their public building stock.

Of those who do know what budget has been allocated, 20% of councillors -the largest single proportion - say it is between £100,000 and £10 million.

The survey coincides with a bespoke service launched by Willmott Dixon called 'Decarbonise Today' to help organisations, particularly in the public sector, make their property portfolios more energy efficient so they can reduce running costs and meet net zero goals.

Jo Mills, the company's Head of Decarbonisation, said: "This is a stark wake-up call of the enormous challenge facing the public sector across the country to decarbonise and meet net zero.

"With warnings from almost half of councils that the situation is so serious they may not be able to keep the lights on, time is rapidly running out for many local authorities to get a viable plan in place to ensure their public buildings remain fit for purpose.

"It's hard to believe that a year on from the pledges made at Cop26 in Glasgow, more than half (56%) of councillors are still unsure what their budget is for retrofitting and decarbonising their estates. There is no doubt that funding remains a huge barrier to this vital work being carried out, leaving many councils struggling to remain on target to meet net zero."

The dash to decarbonise remains a priority, with the polling finding that almost two thirds (63%) of councillors say their local authority has pledged to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030 or sooner. While more than two in five (42%) councillors say their council is on track to deliver on its net zero commitment, almost seven in ten (68%) admit that if work is not carried out to retrofit and decarbonise their public building stock, they will be unable to meet their green targets.

The Decarbonise Today service provides additional skills, resource and expertise to help public sector organisations bid for Government funding to make property more energy efficient, as well as accelerating the process through upgrade work and post-completion analysis of energy performance. It's part of Willmott Dixon's Now or Never strategy to be zero-carbon in its own operations without offsetting by 2030, and this includes assisting customers in achieving the same in their operations.

Unsurprisingly, challenges relating to skills are common, with more than one in five councillors (21%) admitting they are having to outsource retrofit and decarbonisation work to consultants due to a lack of knowledge of retrofit projects within the council.

[Read Willmott Dixon's Brilliant Buildings – Decarbonisation report here.](#)

**509 councillors from across England and Wales were surveyed online. The data was collected between the 9th and 28th November 2022 by Savanta. Data was weighted to be representative of all councillors in England and Wales by political party and region.*