#BeTheSolution

London Councils Community Energy Toolkit

Establishing and Supporting Community Energy

REGEN

REPOWERING LONDON

LONDON COUNCILS

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This section of the toolkit will help you map the community energy sector in your borough, identify local needs and design effective, equitable assistance.

It provides practical steps and examples to help you create the right conditions for community energy to thrive, whether your borough is starting out or already has an active local sector.

***Disclaimer:** This is a non-specialist summary and should not be regarded as financial, legal or procurement advice or guidance for any specific project; the community energy landscape is a fast-moving area and opportunities are likely to change regularly.*

Introduction

As an officer, you can play a vital role in enabling community energy groups (CEGs) to overcome initial barriers to forming and delivering successful projects.

This section will help you to:

- **Map and assess local capacity**, so you know who is active and where support is most needed.

- **Support new or emerging groups** by raising awareness, building skills, and enabling access to early-stage funding.

- **Support new and established groups to deliver projects** by opening up public-sector sites, developing project pipelines, improving access to finance and embedding community energy across the council's relevant functions.

1.

Understanding community energy in your borough

This section contains information on:

- **Assessing how community energy contributes to strategic objectives**

- **Mapping community energy capacity**

- **Understanding support needs**

Understanding community energy in your borough

Developing effective support for community energy begins with understanding how it aligns with your borough's strategic objectives, the existing community energy landscape and the specific needs of local communities.

By mapping capacity, identifying opportunities for collaboration, and engaging meaningfully with residents and organisations, councils can create the conditions for equitable and impactful energy initiatives.

Assessing how community energy contributes to your borough's strategic objectives will help to secure political and organisational support.

Mapping existing community energy activity and networks ensures that programmes build on local strengths, while targeted engagement helps **understand the support that communities need** to participate and thrive.

Assessing how community energy contributes to strategic objectives

To secure officer resource to support community energy, it is important to establish how it can contribute to your borough's strategic objectives.

Understanding and assessing the benefits of community energy for your borough can help to secure political and senior officer sign-off for investment in a support programme, helping you to deliver successful outcomes for CEGs in your borough.

First step:

Assess your corporate strategy documents, such as your Corporate Strategy and Climate Strategy, to understand how community energy can contribute to their strategic aims and intended outcomes.

Engage with your corporate strategy office to further assess how community energy can contribute to your borough's strategic priorities.

The Embedding Community Energy section contains useful tips on securing buy-in from across your organisation, while *The Strategic Case* contains evidence of the benefits of community energy in London.

Benefits:

- Improved **community engagement and public participation** on the energy transition, including with typically excluded groups.

- New resources to **support tackling fuel poverty**, e.g. through community-led energy advice services.

- Realising **funding opportunities** not available to the council (e.g. capital funding of assets through community share offers or other grants specific to community energy), contributing to decarbonisation goals without upfront capital or long-term maintenance costs.

- **Local skills** development and training opportunities, new opportunities for employment and local supply chains.

- Increased **funding for community projects** through community benefit funds derived from community-owned energy projects.

Mapping community energy capacity

It is important to map the existing community energy and wider voluntary / community sector in your borough.

This will help you to connect with relevant organisations, identify who is already active in the sector and understand where there may be potential for new groups to form.

Some groups that are not community energy groups may be interested in developing energy projects, such as faith communities and fuel poverty charities.

These organisations and networks are often key to engaging more vulnerable or disadvantaged communities, as they are trusted and embedded within their communities.

Mapping community energy capacity:

1. **Contact the engagement team** in your borough to review existing community engagement channels and contact lists.

2. **Contact officers** from climate and community teams in neighbouring boroughs to understand capacity in surrounding areas.

3. **Conduct desktop research** into existing community energy groups and wider voluntary and community organisations using: internet searches, social networking platforms, local authority webpages and online community directories; and Community Energy London's project map; list of London Community Energy Fund recipients; Community Energy England's community energy map.

4. **Contact your corporate property team** to understand existing community energy projects located at borough-owned sites, e.g. by reviewing borough asset databases

4. **Contact Community Energy London** to access its membership, monthly stakeholder meetings and site database.

5. **Write up your findings,** mapping data where possible and creating a database of relevant contacts and projects, identifying areas with strong existing networks and identifying opportunities.

Understanding support needs

Assessing the needs of the community helps to ensure that:

- The local authority **understands community needs and ambitions for community energy** and the support that may be required to enable these.

- **Communities are better informed** about what community energy is and why it is a valuable use of local authority resources to support it.

- Residents may **become interested in forming new groups.**

- There is representation of a **diverse range of voices** from across the borough.

You could develop an engagement plan to help map the needs of the community energy sector in your borough.

You should ensure that key groups are reached and that all members of the community can participate. You should also consider how to balance breadth of engagement e.g. a survey, with more detailed engagement that allows you to dig into issues, e.g. focus groups or interviews.

First step: You should talk to your borough's engagement team to develop your plan and link it to existing engagement activity.

Next step: Having assessed the capacity of the community energy sector in the borough and undertaken engagement to understand support needs, you should understand the types of support needed in your area. This might be a mixture of support for the development of new groups and/or supporting groups to develop and deliver projects.

More information:

More detail on developing an inclusive engagement plan can be found in Repowering London's Participatory Toolkit for Building More Inclusive Community Energy Co-operatives

2.

Providing support to establish new organisations

This section contains information on:

- <u>**Building awareness and establishing new organisations**</u>

- <u>**Community Energy London's guide to setting up a community energy group**</u>

- <u>**Knowledge sharing and training**</u>

- <u>**Case study: Barnet Community Energy**</u>

- <u>**Access to early-stage funding**</u>

- <u>**Case study: Hammersmith and Fulham**</u>

Building awareness and establishing new organisations

Challenge: To encourage the establishment of new CEGs, you may need to strengthen awareness and enthusiasm for community energy in your borough.

Groups may also lack the technical knowledge or confidence to set up new CEGs.

Role of the borough:

- Organising or supporting events to raise awareness of community energy to attract new people into the sector

- Supporting a group that is forming to look for new volunteers or employees using borough newsletters and social media.

- Signpost to networks, such as Community Energy London and Community Energy England, who can offer expertise and connections to established CEGs.

- Provide officer time to support CEGs to establish, including writing constitutions, setting up bank accounts and setting up governance structures.

- Officers could be seconded into CEGs.

- Offer training and capacity-building support, such as through Community Energy Pathways.

Case study: Taking it further

In 2014, Plymouth City Council invested a start-up loan, a grant and staff resources to set up Plymouth Energy Community, which was established as an independent community benefit society. The council continues to support the organisation through a service level agreement that provides staff time. The two organisations work closely together on a range of generation and energy advice projects and programmes.

Community Energy London's guide to setting up a community energy group

[CEL's 10 step guide to starting a group](#) sets out how community energy groups establish.

It includes information on:

- How to constitute an organisation
- Ways to obtain funding
- Volunteer guidelines
- How to communicate effectively
- Measuring impact
- Steps on delivering a project
- Identifying suitable technologies and progressing projects

It includes details on different legal forms that organisations can take, such as community benefit societies, cooperatives, limited companies, charities, and community interest companies.

GET READY...	1. Build your team
	2. Research your community
	3. Choose your energy project
SET UP...	4. Choose the type of organization
	5. Establish your governance
	6. Get funding
	7. Engage with your community
...AND GO!	8. Develop communication channels
	9. Identify companies to work with
	10. Monitor and evaluate

Knowledge sharing and training

Challenge: New groups may lack the technical knowledge to initiate projects. For example, they may need support to understand planning processes, energy project development processes and project or organisational finance.

Role of the borough:

Establish knowledge-sharing forums: You could fund administrative support or provide in-kind time or facilities to establish a local forum. For example, Devon County Council funds an external administrator to run quarterly meetings of community energy stakeholders. Other councils have provided office space for networks and organisations to hold meetings, and LB Southwark are planning a community of practice for the sector in their borough.

Commission training: You could fund training to meet skills gaps. Training could be provided by existing CEGs as well as specialists working on specific issues – e.g. lawyers, planning professionals, engagement experts.

An example is Barnet Council's capacity-building workshops (see next slide).

Signpost to other resources, training providers and mentoring programmes, including:

- Community Energy London's peer mentoring programme, which offers community groups free expert advice and support.

- Energy Learning Network, which offers training and resources for local authorities and community organisations.

- Devon's online checklists, which cover a range of topics from business planning to community engagement, share offers and media engagement.

Make local authority officer resources available to support on specific topics. Where expertise is held by the borough, this can be shared with community groups if resources allow. You could nominate a specific officer to lead this work and support them to access expertise from engagement, planning, finance and legal departments.

First step: early engagement with CEGs is critical to understanding the scale and scope of any knowledge or skills gaps.

Case study: Barnet Community Energy

According to Community Energy London's (CEL) Potential Map, there is around 53 MW of potential solar PV capacity in Barnet.

Recognising the opportunity and significant local interest, Barnet Council and CEL hosted four capacity-building workshops in July 2024.

The workshops were highly effective at supporting community groups to participate in energy projects, coinciding with the launch of the first round of the Barnet Community Energy Fund.

To make this happen, Barnet needed to identify budget, get internal buy-in and approvals, engage the target audience and prepare materials and speakers for the events.

The workshops were successful because officers had a clear understanding of the local context and sector, established clearly defined aims and outcomes for the workshops, and worked with with established partners like CEL and key stakeholders from across the community.

Barnet Community Energy's presentation highlights their journey from inception to launch of the fund.

Access to early-stage funding

Challenge: Establishing CEGs requires seed funding, but available funding streams tend to be focused on project feasibility and delivery.

Seed funding is needed for setting up an organisation, meeting space, engagement resources, finding feasible projects, accessing expertise and legal advice or other activities.

Even modest financial support can unlock momentum, allowing groups to formalise their structure, build partnerships and begin scoping viable projects.

This early investment is often a prerequisite for attracting larger-scale funding later on, from your borough or other sources.

Role of the borough:

Setting up a seed funding programme: Relatively small amounts can be granted to support the cost of administration and hosting forums and meetings. Grants could be provided from existing climate budgets or by using other funding streams such as Carbon Offset Funds. You could set up a borough community energy fund with a stream focused on seed funding or a microgrant scheme for general climate action, e.g. Hammersmith and Fulham case study example.

Brokering access to regional and national funding programmes: Where there is not appetite or resource to administer a community energy fund, you could support CEGs to access regional and national funding. This might involve:

- Providing information about grant schemes and setting up meetings
- Providing an endorsement for an organisation's application
- Providing writing support from an officer with relevant skills.

First step:

Identifying a source of funding is critical to establishing a seed funding programme. You could discuss the potential funding needed for a pilot programme with climate budget holders.

More information:

- The sections *Access to Funding and Finance* and *Setting up a Community Energy Fund* may be helpful.

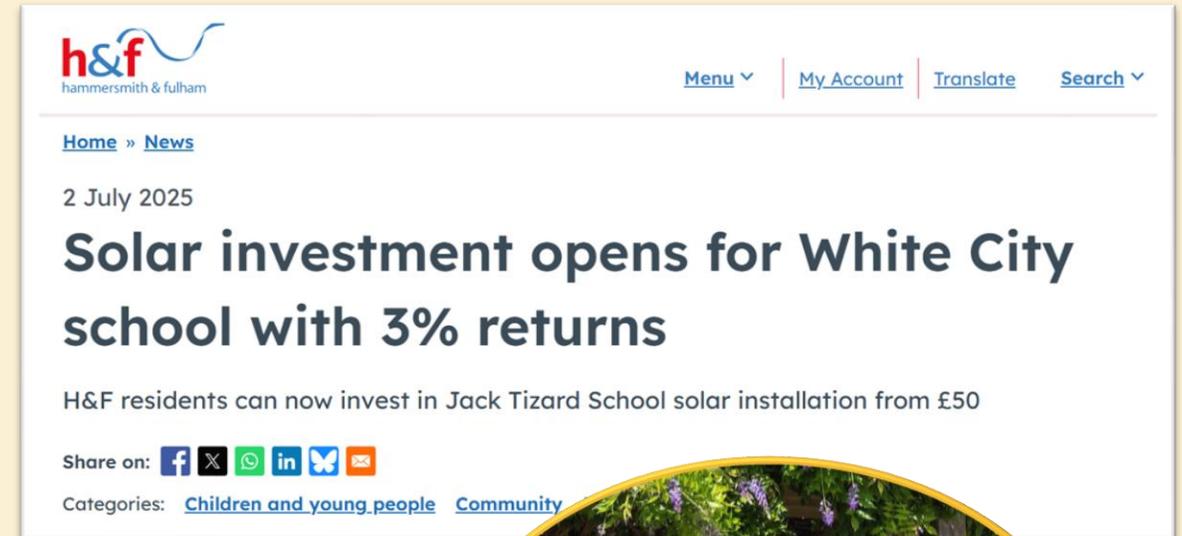- CEL's report Setting up a Local Authority Community Energy Fund gives details of the steps required to set up a fund.

Case study: Hammersmith & Fulham

Hammersmith & Fulham offered climate microgrants of between £250 and £500 to support community groups and individuals to enable collective action on 'climate friendly' behaviours.

Hammersmith and Fulham Community Energy (HFCE) accessed a microgant of £500 to register as an entity in 2023.

This, along with an agreement in place from the local authority that it could investigate sites on the council estate for community energy, enabled HFCE to go on and secure funding from other community energy-specific sources, such as the London Community Energy Fund.

Within a year of registration, HFCE installed 120 kWp of community-owned solar on a specialist school, Jack Tizard School, in White City, with no upfront capital cost to the council. The school is receiving a 10% discount on the electricity it buys from the array (from its usual electricity rate) and is saving in the region of £2000 a year.

h&f
hammersmith & fulham

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Solar investment opens for White City school with 3% returns

H&F residents can now invest in Jack Tizard School solar installation from £50

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Categories: Children and young people   Community

Hammersmith & Fulham Community Energy

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3.

Providing support for project development

This section contains information on:

- **Identifying suitable sites for generation projects**

- **Supporting energy advice**

- **Accessing finance and funding**

- **Emerging approaches**

- **Embedding community energy**

Providing support for project development

This sub-section gives an overview of approaches that the council could take to support project development.

There is further information in the following dedicated Toolkit sections:

- [Solar PV on council buildings](#)

- [Supporting energy advice services](#)

- [Access to funding and finance](#)

- [Setting up a community energy fund](#)

- [Embedding community energy across your council](#)

Identifying suitable sites for generation projects

Challenge: CEGs may need support to identify suitable sites and to connect with decision makers and relevant stakeholders associated with that site.

Role of the borough:

Identification of sites: The resources on the next slide provide a starting point to identify sites.

You can work with CEGs to narrow down the list based on criteria outlined in slide 8 of the *Solar PV on Council Buildings* section of the toolkit.

Support to contact key stakeholders: Identifying and convincing the right people to go ahead with a project is a critical stage in developing any building-focused project. You could make first contact with potential sites to introduce them to the CEG – an email from the borough can add credibility.

Develop an internal strategy: Initial support to identify potential sites could develop into a strategy, working in collaboration with CEGs on a pipeline of projects across the council's estate.

The strategy can consider asset management reviews and targets for reducing the carbon of council owned and/or managed properties.

If your borough has a Corporate Estates Management Strategy or similar, there may be opportunities to embed working with CEGs in the approach and actions.

Identifying suitable sites for generation projects

First step: A useful starting point for project selection is talking to your estates team to look at roof replacement plans where these are available.

You could facilitate a conversation between the CEG and your estates team to understand the scheduled replacements.

Sites where a roof is due to be replaced make prime opportunities as CEG can work directly with the roof installers to reduce overall project costs.

More information:

- Community Energy London has produced a database and online tool which enables boroughs to map identify where sites with high potential for community energy exist.

- London Councils and the GLA have produced a Community Energy Solar Review for each local authority in London that can help to support this exercise.

- The toolkit section, S*olar PV on Council Buildings*, gives more detailed step-by-step insights into supporting groups if a site is identified on a council-owned property.

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Case studies: Developing a pipeline

In Newham, Repowering London undertook a scoping exercise of all public building roofs, allowing them to identify the top targets for community energy installations. This now provides a rough guide to pick out the next projects, aligning the most suitably sized buildings with practical plans like roof replacements, building appetite etc. Newham Council has worked hard to ensure there is internal buy-in and a clear process for delivering projects across teams.

Barnet Council is providing funding for Community Energy Barnet (CEB) to investigate council owned properties. In March 2025, CEB started five feasibility studies on local authority buildings in the borough including schools and leisure centres.

Ealing Council worked with Ealing Transition to install solar on 14 suitable school and children centre roofs. Ealing Transition successfully accessed London Community Energy Fund grants to fund the feasibility work on these sites, as well as additional sites that didn't make it to installation.

Supporting energy advice

Challenge:

CEGs may aim to provide energy advice and retrofit services.

Becoming a reputable provider can take time. Although some support to households and other clients might be through a paid-for service, the main business model for energy advice services relies on access to funding to pay for delivery of advice and measures. This might be through national funding or delivering a service on behalf of the council.

Role of the borough:

You could partner with a CEG to support the delivery of energy advice and retrofit measures.

Examples of this could include:

- Signposting residents to services offered by the CEG. Vulnerable residents accessing council services could be identified as potential users of an energy advice service.

- Partnering with a CEG in a bid for national retrofit funding, enabling the organisation to be a delivery partner on a funded delivery programme.

- Commissioning CEGs to deliver energy advice and measures on buildings owned by the borough.

- Collaborating with CEGs on minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES), creating action plans for houses which do not meet MEES following inspection from a borough enforcement officer.

Supporting energy advice

Taking it further: Some boroughs have commissioned CEGs to deliver energy advice services on their behalf, including nationally funded measures.

First step: Review the borough's current strategy for tackling fuel poverty and delivering retrofit programmes to identify where its objectives align with the capacity and expertise of community energy groups.

More information: The toolkit section *Supporting an Energy Advice Service* sets out the key legal, procurement and practical considerations of working with a CEG on delivering an energy advice service.

Case study: Energy advice

South London Energy Efficiency Partnership (SLEEP) is a strategic fuel poverty alleviation partnership between 11 south London boroughs and a coalition of delivery partners. South east London Community Energy (SELCE) is one of the delivery partners and has built a strong, practical partnership with Lewisham Council through SLEEP, delivering home energy advice, visits and retrofit referrals for vulnerable residents.

The relationship between SELCE and Lewisham has since deepened. Lewisham commissioned SELCE to develop a streamlined route for residents to access ECO4 retrofit funding, building on earlier ECO2 Transition work.

Under this model, SELCE reviews and verifies applications, reducing delays and cutting typical delivery times by months compared with the standard GLA route. With Greenwich Council now delegating ECO approvals to Lewisham, the system enables cross-borough delivery that maximises the reach and impact of energy-efficiency measures.

Lewisham played a key convening role and initially brought SELCE and other delivery partners Groundwork, Thinking Works and Charlton Athletic Community Trust together via a direct award to expand local fuel poverty support, recognising SELCE's trusted community role.

Accessing finance and funding

Challenge: CEGs compete for a finite amount of available funding. Limited available funds, especially at pre-feasibility, can slow the progress of projects and threaten their delivery.

Role of the borough:

Signpost organisations to available funding sources.

Support groups to apply to these funds. E.g., you could provide political endorsement for an application. or officer time to support application writing.

You could also consider joint funding bids, unlocking funding that might otherwise be unavailable to the CEG or borough.

Provide support for CEGs to raise finance for project delivery e.g. promoting share or bond offers or supporting access to low-cost finance by providing loans or supporting loan applications.

Taking it further: Establish a community energy fund to address key funding gaps (e.g. pre-feasibility funding). You might be able to use Carbon Offset Funds to deliver this programme of work.

First step: Engagement with the community energy sector in the area is important to understand what type of funding or finance support would be most useful.

More information:

CEL's report Setting up a Local Authority Community Energy Fund gives details of the steps required to set up a fund.

The toolkit sections on *Setting up a Community Energy Fund* and *Access to Funding and Finance* explore these issues in more detail.

Case studies: Funding for community energy groups

Dedicated **community energy funds** have been established in:

- Barnet
- Southwark
- Hounslow
- Hackney
- Islington.

There are wider-ranging community climate/carbon funds that CEGs can apply to in Camden, Westminster and Haringey.

Support for **share offers**:

Hammersmith and Fulham Council promoted share offers for Hammersmith and Fulham Community Energy with strong comms support through their:

- Website
- Newsletters
- Video.

not only will benefit the school but our local community as well.

Emerging approaches

Groups are increasingly working on a range of areas outside of generation and energy advice projects.

Transport:

From active travel projects to car clubs and electric vehicle hubs, community energy groups can develop low carbon transport projects and programmes.

Example: Stavely community Ebikes project has published a how-to manual to encourage other communities to deliver e-bike projects.

Heat networks:

Heat networks tend to be commercial-led infrastructure projects but there may be opportunities for community organisations to play key roles in facilitating their development, such as engaging with the public and potential customers or raising finance and support through community share offers.

In addition, some professionalised CEGs are leading the development of community energy projects in their area. Examples include Aberdeen Heat & Power and Net Zero Terrace Streets.

Example: Repowering London has been a partner in GreenSCIES, an initiative that engaged the community to co-design a smart, local energy system in Islington. The system will use local waste heat and renewable energy to deliver heating, cooling, power and electric-vehicle charging to residents and businesses.

Heat pump market readiness

CEGs can engage with households on the benefits of heat pumps and work on schemes to reduce costs, such as bulk buying.

Example: Wadebridge Renewable Energy Network in Cornwall delivered a workshop *Mad about Heat Pumps* in September 2025 to raise awareness of the technology and allow people to discuss issues and questions.

Emerging approaches

Flexibility and innovation:

CEGs can work with Distribution Network Operators and others on innovation trials, such as investigating the value of community-led flexibility services.

Example: Repowering London took part in Home Response, which tested new, smart energy technologies in homes as part of The Mayor of London's Energy for Londoners programme. The aim was to cut energy bills and encourage people to be more flexible in how they use electricity. Repowering London took the lead in recruiting participants, keeping the project community-centred, and making sure participants got the most benefit from the trial.

Microgrids:

Community energy groups can lead the development of microgrids with new housing estates, such as Bristol Energy Co-op's microgrid connecting new housing development with solar panels to a communal battery.

Community awareness and youth engagement:

CEGs can deliver workshops and training with groups in the community and schools.

Example: Repowering London hosts various initiatives, such as the Voyage to Repower program to train young people for the green sector and the ReCreate education program for primary school children. They also partner with other community energy groups, like North Kensington Community Energy and Community Energy Newham, to involve youth in co-designing community energy projects.

Embedding community energy

Challenge: Supporting community energy projects requires the support and collaboration of multiple teams and individuals within the council.

Role of the borough:

It is important to increase awareness of community energy across the council. You could do so by:

- Facilitating discussions between CEGs and key departments.

- Writing briefings that set out the benefits of working with community energy – drawing on the strategic case report in this toolkit.

- Inviting CEGs to present to key internal stakeholders.

- Taking key officers and councillors on site visits to existing community energy sites.

- Embedding community energy into key strategies, delivery plans and planning policy.

More information: The *Embedding Community Energy* section of the toolkit has more detail about steps you can take.