



Active
Travel
England

Local Authority Active Travel Capability Ratings 2024

Published September 2024



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CEO Foreword



Since we published our first assessment of local authorities' capability to deliver active travel schemes

in March 2023, Active Travel England (ATE) has been working to build capability in authorities through targeted funding, support, training and guidance.

We work with local authorities and other bodies to help them put in place the infrastructure and facilities that make it easier for more people to walk, wheel and cycle, more often, on local journeys. Whether through facilitating cycle training, ensuring planning applications take account of active travel or enabling the installation of better facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, Active Travel England aims to make everyone's lives better.

The capability ratings are about shining a light on our delivery partners and about helping those local authorities that want to deliver safe, high-quality walking, wheeling and cycling interventions to do so, in a way that brings their communities with them. Throughout last year, we supported all authorities with our training offer and funded them to develop the skills and capability needed to deliver good active travel interventions.

We also delivered dedicated support to the lowest rated authorities to help them upskill officers and implement action plans. Just because a local authority has a low rating does not mean it lacks ambition. I have seen first-hand how some local authorities have very ambitious plans for walking, wheeling and cycling. Our job is to help those authorities succeed. And in that context, I am delighted that all authorities we ranked zero in 2023 have moved up to a level one in 2024, and we look forward to working with them to make more progress in future. Our capability ratings not only recognise the progress being made in active travel across the country; they also help us to target funding. They were used in 2024 allocations, which will enable local authorities to continue to develop their capability to deliver high quality active travel programmes.

I'd like to thank authorities across England who continue to work hard to help us give more people more transport choice.

Danny Williams
Chief Executive Officer
Active Travel England

Introduction

At Active Travel England, it is our job to support partners nationwide to deliver projects that create safe and comfortable routes, giving more people the option to walk, wheel or cycle for local journeys, and that work for all road users. This will help to ensure the Government achieves its objectives for 50% of all local journeys in towns and cities to be walked, wheeled or cycled by 2030.

The capability of local authorities is central to this ambition. To support this, we undertake capability ratings to assess each authority's ability to plan, design and deliver active travel schemes, and ensure public money is delivering optimal benefits. They also allow us to track council's capability over time, targeting support to where it is needed most and to ensure value for money. It also introduces a good level of competition between authorities to help drive up standards.

What are the ratings?

Ratings are an assessment of how effective authorities currently are at planning, designing and delivering the type of schemes that will support the objectives set out in the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy. They focus primarily on 3 areas:

- local leadership
- network planning
- delivery

All local and combined authorities in England (excluding London) were invited to self-assess their own capability between levels 0 and 4, at both section level and for constituent questions within the section.

The five capability rating levels can be broadly characterised as follows:

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- **Level 0:** Little local leadership or support and limited record of delivery
 - **Level 1:** Some local leadership and support with developing plans and isolated interventions
 - **Level 2:** Visible local leadership and support, with emerging network
 - **Level 3:** Strong local leadership and support, substantial network in place with increasing modal share
 - **Level 4:** Dense network in place with a high proportion of trips made by walking, wheeling and cycling. Very supportive leadership and policies to further improve transport choice
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How they are linked to funding

The capability ratings are used to calculate funding allocations for local authorities for 2024/25. This includes the Capability Fund that provides funding to local authorities to boost technical capability to deliver high quality schemes. Ratings are used to guide the initial allocation of dedicated active travel funding. Higher rated authorities are eligible to access more funding, ensuring that investment is appropriate to the level of capability.



Approach

Building on feedback from 2023's capability ratings process, this year we changed the way in which self-assessment data was collected to reduce the burden on authorities.

Listening to feedback from authorities, we extended the window for self-assessment evidence from three weeks to eight weeks and built a more intuitive survey covering the following:

- **Section 1 Contextual information:** organisational information on staffing and resource levels
- **Section 2 Leadership:** commitment of council leaders and elected politicians to active travel
- **Section 3 Network planning:** capability in development of strategic network plans e.g. Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plan (LCWIP), or equivalent;

- **Section 4 Delivery:** ability to deliver projects on time and to budget
- **Section 5 Overall capability assessment:** final assessment of capability across all key dimensions

We also developed the collection approach to include questions and associated guidance in four areas for local leadership, five areas for network planning and six areas for delivery.

The self-assessment process ran from October to December 2023. After authorities completed a self-assessment, responses were put through a moderation exercise to examine the ratings and supporting evidence supplied by authorities. This considered the evidence provided by local authorities against performance information held by ATE.

A final moderated rating was generated which was used to determine final capability ratings.

2024 ratings

Self-assessment returns were received from all 80 Local Transport Authorities in England¹ with the results set out below.

This year, nine authorities have changed their overall rating, with eight increasing, and one reducing:

- Four authorities have increased from level 0 to 1
- Three authorities have increased from level 1 to level 2
- One authority has increased from level 2 to level 3
- One authority has decreased from level 2 to level 1

The overall level breakdown for 2024, compared to 2023, is as follows (Table 1):

Year/Level	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Total
2023	4	40	30	5	0	79
2024	0	42	32	6	0	80
Change	-4	+2	+2	+1	0	

There are now no level 0 authorities, with all previous level 0 authorities demonstrating sufficient capability to justify moving to level 1. The majority of local authorities received level 1 and level 2 ratings, as was the case last year. One authority moved to level 3 this year.

1. An increase of 1 from the 2023 exercise, with Cumbria splitting to Cumberland and Cumberland and Westmorland.

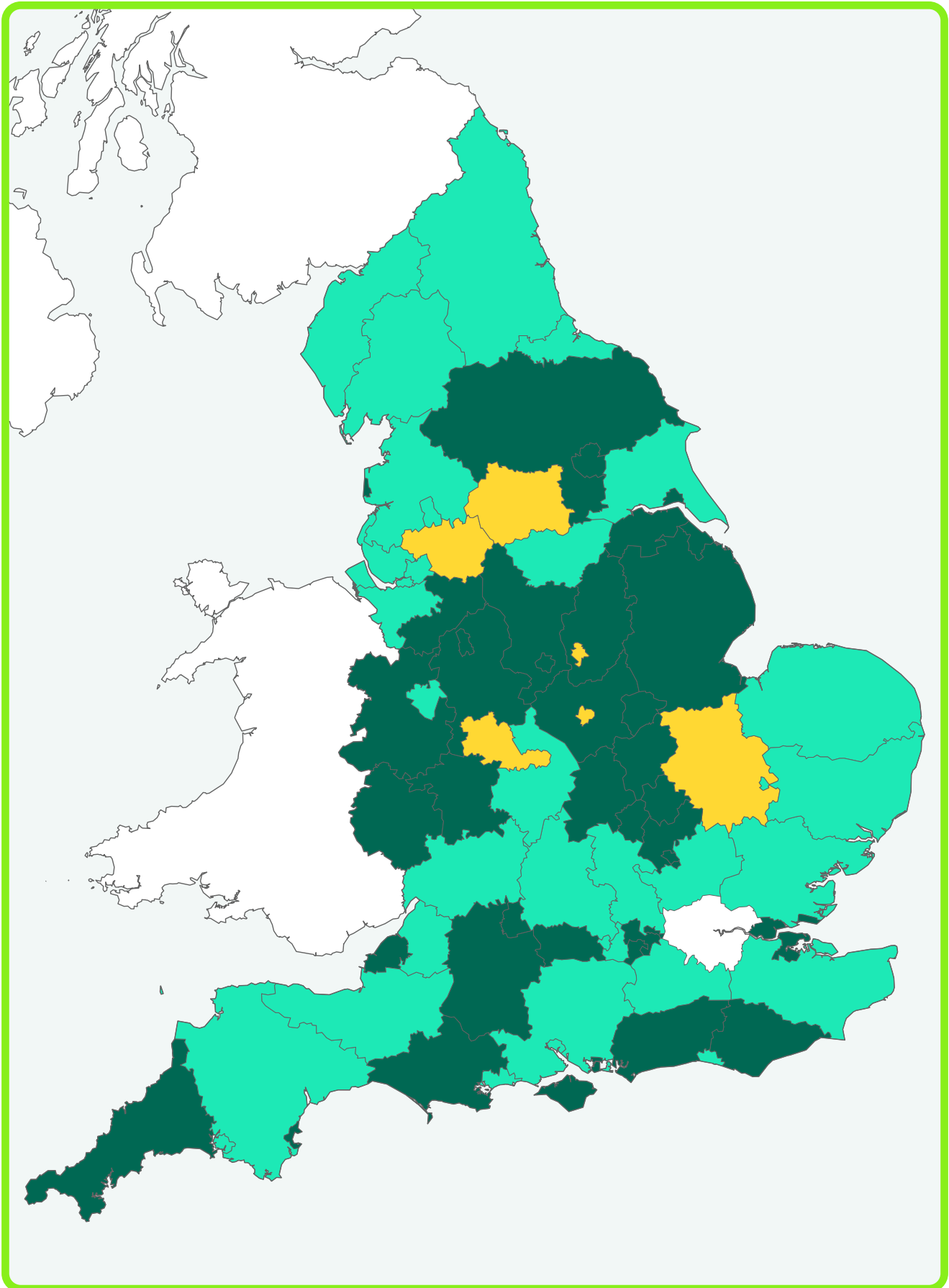
Table 2: Capability Ratings by authority 2024 vs 2023:

Local Transport Authority	CR rating 2023	CR rating 2024	Change
Bedford	1	1	
Blackburn with Darwen	1	2	+1
Blackpool	1	1	
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	2	2	
Bracknell Forest	1	1	
Brighton and Hove	2	2	
Buckinghamshire	2	2	
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CA	2	3	+1
Central Bedfordshire	1	1	
Cheshire East	1	1	
Cheshire West and Chester	1	2	+1
Cornwall	1	1	
Cumberland	2	2	New LTA
Derby	1	1	
Derbyshire	1	1	
Devon	2	2	
Dorset	1	1	
East Riding of Yorkshire	2	2	
East Sussex	1	1	
Essex	2	2	
Gloucestershire	2	2	
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	3	3	
Hampshire	2	2	
Herefordshire	1	1	
Hertfordshire	2	2	
Isle of Wight	1	1	
Isles of Scilly	1	1	
Kent	1	2	+1
Kingston upon Hull	1	1	
Lancashire	2	2	
Leicester	3	3	
Leicestershire	0	1	+1
Lincolnshire	1	1	
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority	2	2	
Luton	1	1	
Medway	1	1	
Milton Keynes	1	1	
Norfolk	2	2	

Local Authority Active Travel Capability Ratings 2024

Local Transport Authority	CR rating 2023	CR rating 2024	Change
Northeast Joint Transport Committee	2	2	
Northeast Lincolnshire	1	1	
North Lincolnshire	1	1	
North Northamptonshire	1	1	
North Somerset	1	1	
North Yorkshire	1	1	
Nottingham	3	3	
Nottinghamshire	2	1	-1
Oxfordshire	2	2	
Plymouth	2	2	
Portsmouth	1	1	
Reading	2	2	
Rutland	0	1	+1
Shropshire	1	1	
Slough	1	1	
Somerset	2	2	
South Yorkshire Combined Authority	2	2	
Southampton	2	2	
Southend-on-Sea	1	1	
Staffordshire	1	1	
Stoke-on-Trent	1	1	
Suffolk	2	2	
Surrey	2	2	
Swindon	1	1	
Tees Valley Combined Authority	2	2	
Telford and Wrekin	2	2	
Thurrock	1	1	
Torbay	1	1	
Warrington	2	2	
Warwickshire	2	2	
West Berkshire	1	1	
West Midlands Combined Authority	3	3	
West Northamptonshire	1	1	
West of England Combined Authority	2	2	
West Sussex	0	1	+1
West Yorkshire Combined Authority	3	3	
Westmorland and Furness	2	2	New LTA
Wiltshire	1	1	
Windsor and Maidenhead	1	1	
Wokingham	2	2	
Worcestershire	0	1	+1
York	1	1	

Figure 1: Map denoting Capability Ratings 2024.



Rating: ● 0 ● 1 ● 2 ● 3 ● 4

Case studies

Case study 1: West Sussex County Council (moving from level 0 to 1)

West Sussex was awarded a Level 0 in the first ATE capability ratings in 2023. To their credit, West Sussex members and officers felt they wanted to do better. Officers agreed an action plan with ATE which detailed how the authority's leadership and officers would work together. The action plan covered a range of activities which included training on design best practice, design support from the ATE Inspectorate and ATE-led discussions with elected members. At these sessions the determination and passion of the lead member, Councillor Joy Dennis, to improve the authority's reputation for active travel delivery was clear. Councillor Dennis told us she wanted to move forward with a plan to improve safety for journeys to school and took personal ownership of a programme to introduce the first school streets project in the county.

West Sussex officers worked with ATE to undertake design reviews for current and future schemes. Although some of the scheme designs were relatively low complexity, officers showed a good level of understanding of design and value for money requirements. Crucially it was felt that the schemes could also potentially resolve some long-standing issues in a way that could be well supported locally. We hope these schemes provide a springboard for the council to bring forward more ambition in future if they wish to demonstrate the behaviours of higher capability level authorities.

West Sussex County Council;

"Over the last 12 months West Sussex County Council has worked closely with Active Travel England to develop and agree an Action Plan to achieve level 1 capability status. Throughout the process ATE officers were very supportive and their advice and feedback have been extremely helpful. The support we received from ATE has given us an excellent platform from which we can continue to improve our capability."

Case study 2: Leicestershire County Council (moving from a level 0 to 1)

Leicestershire was awarded a Level 0 Capability in the first ATE capability ratings. Officers and members at Leicestershire were determined to respond positively to this rating. Both teams collaborated to develop an action plan that was sponsored by senior councillors and officers, which the council backed up by employing a dedicated officer to drive delivery of the plan.

Leicestershire completed their action plan within six months and subsequently submitted new designs including an ambitious safer junction on the A6 in Oadby which was positively reviewed by ATE during a design review. Forming part of their recently approved South Leicestershire Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, the junction was of a complexity more typical of a Level 2 or 3 authority. This commitment to active travel in the three key areas was sufficient for ATE to endorse Leicestershire's journey of improvement with an improved rating to Level 1 in the 2024 ratings.

Leicestershire County Council;

“Active Travel England and Leicestershire County Council (LCC) have developed our positive working relationship over the last 18 months, agreeing and delivering on an action plan through ongoing collaborative working after initially receiving a zero Capability Rating. A key part of this success is the dedication and commitment from ATE staff working with our equally dedicated LCC officers, while engaging with our elected Members.

“Increasing LCC’s Capability Rating to a 1 is a direct result of this positive collaborative working and joint funding commitments from LCC and ATE, representing a real success story.”



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