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Challenger Parties in Power Locally

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Executive Summary

This report examines the rapid rise of challenger parties in English local government following electoral gains in May 2025, focusing on how *Reform UK* and the *Green Party of England and Wales* have adapted to executive roles. Evidence from multiple case studies shows that, rather than transforming local governance, these parties have generally worked within existing institutional frameworks, with some early disruption typically giving way to learning and stabilisation as members adjust to formal procedures and constraints.

Clear differences in governing style are evident. Reform-led councils have in some cases experienced higher levels of early instability, including leadership changes and internal tensions, alongside taking actions communicating their political values. In contrast, Green-led councils have tended to emphasise collaboration, particularly in coalition or minority contexts, placing weight on inclusive governance practices.

Although both parties pursue distinct policy agendas, their capacity to deliver major change has been limited by financial pressures, statutory requirements, public reaction, and national policy frameworks. Reform administrations have generally prioritised cost control, service delivery, and policies clearly signalling political values, alongside substantive policy changes relating for example to LGBT communities, asylum seekers and Special Educational Needs and Disabled children's services. Green administrations have also prioritised financial management, whilst also advancing environmental and social programmes, often incorporating these into key council strategies. Constraints such as national policy and local public reactions have often led to moderation of ambitions for both parties.

Financial management across challenger-led councils largely reflects sector norms, with limited divergence in practice. Reform councils have emphasised efficiency and council tax constraint, while Green councils have combined responsible budgeting with targeted investment. Similarly, formal systems of accountability remain consistent. Reform councils show more variation in engagement with scrutiny and the media, whereas some Green councils have explored more collaborative and participative governance approaches.

Across all cases, strong external constraints from central government and funding structures have encouraged pragmatic governing behaviour. Overall, the findings both from these case studies and existing European research suggest that challenger parties in local government are shaped by adaptation to governing constraints.

The report identifies some key implications for councils and challenger parties. Councils can be reassured that institutional resilience appears strong despite some early disruptions. Maintaining constructive member-officer relations is critical, including providing an effective councillor induction process alongside ensuring effective scrutiny and public engagement arrangements.

For challenger parties, the research highlights the value of experience in local government in building capacity and demonstrating competence. The transition to governing requires rapid adaptation which would benefit from effective preparation and support from within party structures. Maintaining internal party cohesion and reconciling political narratives to the pragmatic demands of governing are key to effective transition into executive leadership.

Challenger Parties in Power Locally

Introduction

The rapid emergence of challenger parties (here defined as parties without prior executive governing experience¹) in positions of local authority leadership represents one of the most significant recent developments in English local governance. Challenger parties have historically been studied primarily through their national electoral performance or behaviour in opposition. However, their growing presence in executive roles at the sub-national level presents a distinctive opportunity to examine how such parties adapt to the realities of governing.

In England, this development has been exemplified by the electoral breakthroughs of Reform UK in the 2025 local elections and the continued expansion of the Green Party of England and Wales in local authorities since 2023. Reform achieved control or leading positions in multiple county and unitary councils, while the Green Party consolidated a mix of majority, coalition and minority leadership roles, particularly in district councils. These trends continued in the May 2026 local elections in England, with Reform gaining 1,452 councillors and 14 councils, and Greens gaining 441 councillors and five councils².

This policy briefing synthesises emerging findings from the first phase of research involving structured analysis of 25 UK case studies including 13 led by Reform UK, one where Reform is the largest party but does not lead the council, and 11 led by the Green Party. The research examines how challenger parties have governed in practice during the year since May 2025 and involved documentary analysis including council minutes and policy statements, media reports and political statements. These cases provide a diverse set of governing contexts, ranging from majority administrations in large counties to complex coalition arrangements in smaller districts. The briefing is informed by a wider body of European experience and academic research.

The briefing proceeds by examining UK case studies organised thematically, focusing on governance, policymaking, financial management, accountability, and intergovernmental relations. It then situates these findings within the broader European literature, before examining the implications for councils and challenger parties themselves. Finally, it provides overall conclusions about the early experience of challenger party governance in England, including areas of future research. The analysis is structured to distinguish between Reform UK and Green Party experiences, highlighting both shared dynamics and important apparent divergences.

UK Case Studies

Governance and Institutional Adaptation

Across both sets of case studies, challenger parties have largely operated within the established governance frameworks of English local government. There is little evidence of structural transformation of governance systems in the immediate term. Instead, adaptation has tended to involve incremental adjustments, combined with a period of learning as newly elected members become familiar with statutory responsibilities, procedural requirements and relationships with officers and partner organisations.

However, this adaptation has not been uniform. The period immediately following electoral success has often been characterised by instability, particularly in councils where members lacked prior governing experience or where party organisation was relatively under-developed. Member–officer relations have generally remained effective, though tensions have arisen in places. Leadership style and internal cohesion emerged as critical variables shaping early governing dynamics.

Reform UK

The Reform UK party was formed in 2019 from the earlier ‘Brexit Party’ established in 2018. In the English local elections, the party won three seats in 2024, 677 in 2025 and 1,452 in 2026. Although Reform UK as a party had not controlled a council prior to 2025, several of its local councillors as individuals had experience of governing in mainstream parties. At least six (of 13) Reform leaders in our case study councils were previously councillors with the Conservative Party and a further two with one or more other political parties.

Many Reform UK-led councils have experienced a phase of institutional adaptation characterised by initial disruption followed by gradual normalisation. Several councils experienced early procedural challenges with formal governance arrangements. For example, Durham County Council cancelled a full council meeting³, while Worcestershire’s first cabinet meeting lasted only 20 minutes⁴.

Governance structures have typically remained relatively unchanged but have been selectively modified to reflect political priorities. For example, some Reform councils have removed climate change or similar portfolios from cabinet structures. Changes to cabinet portfolios are not unusual when parties take over control of a council.

Political instability has been a notable feature in some councils. Several Reform-led councils have experienced leadership changes, councillor resignations or defections, and disciplinary issues (often linked to social media conduct). Open Council Data suggests that approximately 9 per cent of Reform councillors changed party affiliation within our case study period, compared to around 5 per cent for mainstream parties⁵. Four out of our 13 Reform councils experienced change in the council leader within the first year⁶.

Member–officer relations have generally remained effective, but tensions have sometimes been more visible than usual. These have often related to issues seen as communicating important political values, such as disputes over which flags should be flown. Although chief executive turnover has occurred in a few cases, overall the level of churn doesn’t appear exceptional for authorities experiencing changes of political control.

Greens Party of England and Wales

The Green Party of England and Wales has existed since 1990. By 2009, the number of Green local councillors rose to more than 100. In 2011, the party led a council for the first time, when they took minority control of Brighton and Hove City Council. Since 2017, the party has increased its number of councillors at every election. The 2023 United Kingdom local elections saw the party winning an overall council majority for the first time (Mid Suffolk District Council).

Green-led councils have tended to prioritise collaborative governance practices such as cross-party arrangements. In many cases, this reflects their governing context, which frequently involves coalition or minority administrations. For example, East Suffolk council has developed mixed cabinets, enhanced scrutiny functions and efforts to further embed transparency in decision-making processes⁷.

Babergh District Council provides a distinctive example of coalition design, with advance agreement to a formal rotation of leadership between coalition partners⁸. Group leaders from three parties devised a unique plan for the 4 years of the electoral cycle whereby the leadership rotates on an annual basis – Liberal Democrats for the first year, Greens for the second and fourth, and Independents for the third.

Some Green-led councils have moved or explored moving from the cabinet/leader model to a committee structure, which some consider a more inclusive approach to decision making as it involves more councillors in making executive decisions. For example, Bristol City Council, following the abolition of its mayoral system, adopted a committee-based structure in May 2025⁹. However, the timing of the current Local Government Reorganisation process has often led to these governance decisions being delayed. These innovations may be further limited by the English Devolution & Community Empowerment Act, which effectively bans councils from re-introducing the traditional committee system.

Apart from planned rotations, such as in Babergh and Hastings councils, this research didn't identify changes of council leaders at any of the Green case study councils in the year after the May 2025 elections. Green party councillors have tended to remain with the party, with OpenCouncilData¹⁰ suggesting under 40 changes in the last year out of almost 900 councillors (4.4%) which is relatively low.

Member–officer relations in Green-led councils appear generally constructive, supported by continuity in senior officer leadership and a shared emphasis on organisational stability. While political tensions exist, they tend to be channelled through formal governance processes.

Conclusion

Overall, challenger parties have largely adapted to existing governance frameworks rather than transforming them. Reform UK councils have in places demonstrated greater early instability and more visible tensions, while Green-led councils have prioritised collaborative governance. In both cases, adaptation to the constraints of local government has been a central feature of early governing experience.

Policy Innovation and Service Delivery

Challenger parties have retained distinct policy agendas in office, but their ability to implement transformative change has been constrained by legal and national policy frameworks, financial resources and public response. As a result, policy innovation has often taken one of two forms: incremental change embedded within existing systems, or decisions which have high communicative significance. Public reaction emerged as a significant constraint, particularly where policy changes affect everyday services. In such cases, challenger parties have frequently modified or moderated proposals.

Reform UK

Reform-led councils have often prioritised policy agendas centred on cost control and have also taken symbolic actions communicating political values and identity. For example, several councils introduced restrictions on flag displays, limiting them to the Union flag and excluding other symbols such as Pride or Ukrainian flags¹¹. Reform councils have addressed substantive policy issues such as climate change, support for LGBT communities, services for asylum seekers, housing allocation policies and home-to-school transport including services for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Analysis by the London School of Economics¹² in March 2026 found that seven Reform UK-led councils (out of the 10 examined) had ‘scrapped’ their climate targets and that climate change denial had been expressed by Reform UK councillors in five councils. However, work related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions continued in these councils and there was variation in how ‘scrapping net zero’ was being implemented across Reform councils, which the researchers concluded reflected an apparent divergence of views within the party.

In Durham, the council proposed withdrawing funding from events such as the Gay Pride celebrations¹³. The council’s deputy leader criticised the annual celebration on the social media platform X¹⁴, arguing the event had ‘stopped being a celebration of gay rights a long time ago’. He said it had ‘morphed into a travelling billboard for gender ideology and political activism that many in the gay community - myself included - want no part of’. He positioned the decision as releasing funding for other services, stating ‘Our residents deserve bins emptied, roads fixed, and services funded - not more council-sponsored politics in fancy dress’. The council funding was £2,500 per year from 2016 to 2024, and £12,500 in 2025 with the additional funds from a City of Culture bid fund.

Derbyshire has adopted policies aimed at changing support provided to asylum seekers. In February 2026, a motion at the full council meeting demanded national government provide a timeline for ending the use of hotels for asylum seekers, and encouraged each local council in the county to ‘only meet the minimum duties set out in legislation in relation to housing any individuals leaving asylum hotels, and ... not go beyond these statutory requirements. This includes not being placed in Houses in Multiple Occupation when there is no local connection’¹⁵. The motion stated that we ‘have a two-tier system where asylum seeking men will get housed without a local connection but British people and those who came here legally do not have this entitlement’. The motion was passed with a large majority.

West Northamptonshire council has tightened its housing allocation rules around local connections and employment¹⁶. The stated aim of the new policy is to ‘make access to social and affordable housing fairer, clearer and more consistent while ensuring those most in need of a home are given the highest priority’. The changes included extending the requirement for residency in the council area to three out of five years; on employment, the council will require proof of permanent employment 16+ hours/week for six of last 12 months; and on immediate family local connection, close family will need to have lived in WNC for a minimum of five years continuously. Applicants who do not establish a local connection to West Northamptonshire will not qualify to join the housing register. The council’s announcement stresses that its new policy aligns with national housing legislation and statutory guidance.

Warwickshire proposed changes to home-to-school transport including distance thresholds, although these were constrained by national legal requirements¹⁷. In October 2025, the council leader wrote to the Secretary of State for Education seeking permission for councils to set their own rules over children's walking distances between home and school. In response, the SoS response accused Reform of dragging children ‘back to the Victorian era’. A motion carried at full council in December 2025 requested that the Leader withdraw the letter¹⁸. The equality impact assessment¹⁹ published by WCC accompanying public consultation on the proposed changes explained that these included the removal of SEND nursery age transport provision. The most affected group would be the Post 16 SEND cohort as there would be ‘expectations that this cohort of pupils will be able to independently travel to their education setting and will consider transport to their education settings at the time of choosing their courses’ (page 10). The assessment noted ‘There will be expectations that families will assist pupils with disabilities, where previously they may have received transport outside of statutory requirements, to take responsibility for their child accessing their education setting’.

Green Party of England and Wales

Green-led councils have also prioritised prudent financial management, alongside environmental and social policy agendas, with a strong emphasis on mainstreaming climate considerations across service delivery.

Councils such as East Suffolk²⁰ have embedded environmental objectives within corporate strategies, planning guidance and performance frameworks. Waste collection reforms have been widely pursued alongside national policy changes, including the introduction of food waste collections and changes to residual waste cycles²¹. In Bristol, the council advanced initiatives such as liveable neighbourhoods and waste service reforms, though these have generated significant public controversy and required subsequent adjustment²². Lancaster has pursued a comprehensive local area energy plan, positioning itself as an early adopter of whole-systems energy planning²³.

Some Green councils have also pursued social policy measures, such as increasing penalties for landlords who breach safety standards for vulnerable tenants²⁴, and maintaining or expanding council tax support schemes for low-income households²⁵.

While these policies often reflect substantive programmatic priorities, they remain subject to financial and political constraints. Behavioural change policies, particularly those affecting transport and waste, have sometimes proven contentious with local residents.

In Bristol, an expansion of low-traffic neighbourhoods and bus-priority corridors was presented as a way to ‘rebalance’ streets and cut emissions, but some residents argued that traffic had merely been displaced onto boundary roads, increasing congestion and journey times for commuters and carers. Public meetings grew tense as critics accused councillors of pushing through changes too quickly, with insufficient consultation, while supporters countered that disruption was inevitable in any meaningful transition toward cleaner transport²⁶. Tensions also arose around suggested waste and recycling reforms aimed at normalising lower-waste lifestyles, where earlier proposals to move to four-weekly black-bin collections provoked strong resistance²⁷.

Conclusion

Both Reform and Green councils have maintained distinctive policy agendas, but their capacity to deliver transformative change has been constrained. Reform councils have tended to emphasise cost control, symbolic measures such as flag policies, and substantive policy shifts including around LGBT communities, asylum seekers, and home to school transport. National policy has sometimes restricted opportunities for policy change in these areas. Green councils have also emphasised effective financial management, whilst often pursuing programme-based environmental and social reforms. Some of these have resulted in some negative public reaction, such as resistance to restrictions on car access. The financial and practical constraints of government have therefore moderated ambitions in both parties.

Financial Management and Resource Allocation

Financial strategies across challenger-led councils have remained largely aligned with local government sector norms, reflecting strong institutional constraints. However, differences are apparent in the framing of financial decisions.

Reform UK

Reform-led councils have emphasised cost reduction, efficiency and restraint in council tax increases. Claims of substantial savings have featured prominently, though these sometimes lacked definitional clarity as to whether they included the effects only of new savings measures, or also included previously planned savings, the use of reserves and/or central government funding increases.

Council tax increases in Reform-led counties for 2026–27 were on average slightly below sector averages. Of the 21 county councils, Reform had the highest increase in one case: 9% in Worcestershire, which was one of 30 councils receiving Exceptional Financial Support from the government in 2025/6 and 35 councils in 2026/7. The remaining eight Reform county councils set increases averaging 3.9%, slightly below the average increase set by 12 non-Reform counties (4.9%). However, it is noted that these eight councils also had increases slightly below the group of 12 in the previous year, when Reform was not in control, so this may also reflect lower financial pressures in these areas.

Green Party of England and Wales

Green-led councils have pursued fiscally cautious strategies combined with targeted social and environmental investment. Council tax increases have generally aligned with sector averages.

Innovative financing approaches have also been evident. For example, Bristol launched a climate investment scheme to raise £2 million in private finance for renewable energy projects in council buildings²⁸. Warwick District introduced a 100 per cent premium on second homes and empty properties²⁹.

Social protection measures have been an important feature, including expanded council tax reduction schemes in some Green councils.

Conclusion

While financial strategies remain constrained by national frameworks, Reform councils have often emphasised cost control and restraining council tax increases, whereas Green councils tended to present effective financial management alongside broader social and environmental objectives.

Political Accountability and Citizen Engagement

Both Reform and Green administrations have retained conventional mechanisms of political accountability, including scrutiny committees and formal public consultation processes. However, there are notable differences in emphasis and approach.

Reform UK

The main forms of public engagement in Reform councils in their first year have been statutory public consultation activities. These councils have engaged residents using standard local government approaches, such as online surveys, formal consultation documents, and stakeholder meetings. The topics consulted upon include proposals around local government reorganisation and service changes.

Media relations have varied, ranging from cooperative engagement in some Reform councils to hostility and restricted communication leading to legal challenge³⁰. In Worcestershire, the council leader issued a formal 'cease and desist' notice in response to an opposition councillor's criticisms of her and the party involving videos which the council leader said had led to her being harassed by members of the public³¹.

Complaints about councillor conduct, particularly relating to social media, appear to have increased. Analysis by PoliticsHome, based on responses to FOI requests to councils, suggested increases in complaints against councillors in several Reform councils³² including Staffordshire, where complaints increased from 10 in 2024 to 140 in 2025, Durham (8 to 52), and Kent (10 to 58). The BBC also reported increases in complaints in Leicestershire³³, where Reform councillors had received 35 complaints compared to 5 for the whole council in 23/24. Since there is no consistent national reporting of councillor complaints in councils, it is not possible to contextualise these figures for councils led by other parties, but it is likely that many of these have also seen some level of increase. For example, the PoliticsHome analysis noted that in Devon, which is led by Liberal Democrats, complaints increased from 11 in 2024 to 43 in 2025.

Green Party of England and Wales

Alongside standard scrutiny and consultation processes, some Green-led councils have demonstrated more innovative approaches to democratic engagement, including using digital participation, exploring new parish councils, and creating cross-party Member Champions.

Deliberative and participative approaches to decision-making have been used in some Green councils. For example, Bristol council has used digital participation linked to climate and planning policy, combining tech with deliberative engagement³⁴.

Lancaster Council³⁵ is exploring new community governance structures. The initiative reflects a localist response to anticipated restructuring by proposing the creation of new parish or town councils in currently unparished urban areas such as Lancaster and Heysham, with the aim of strengthening grassroots representation and ensuring communities retain a direct democratic voice even if higher-tier authorities become larger and more remote under planned Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

Forest of Dean District Council appointed eight councillors from different parties as Member Champions as part of a new initiative to strengthen support for local communities³⁶. The initiative is designed to ensure that a wider range of local voices is heard and reflected in decision-making, while strengthening connections between the council and the communities it serves.

Scrutiny in the Green-led case study councils has tended to operate in line with other councils. As expected, on some major issues there have been challenges to the process of policy making, for example in the Forest of Dean council a no-confidence motion was proposed citing a failure adequately to engage members in the development of the Local Plan. The motion fell by one vote (18 in favour and 19 against with 1 abstention)³⁷.

We did not identify up to date publicly available information on complaints against councillors in the case study Green-led councils, however we note the lack of significant media comment in this area.

Conclusion

Formal accountability structures remain consistent across both parties. Reform councils have used conventional approaches to public consultation. At least in the short term, complaints against councillors appear to have increased and in a few cases relations with the media became adversarial. In general, Green councils in our case studies put more emphasis on deliberative engagement approaches alongside conventional methods.

Intergovernmental Relations

Overall findings

All challenger-led councils operate within a framework of strong external constraints, including central government policy, and (where they exist) relationships with combined authorities, other tiers of local government, and/or local government reorganisation processes. These constraints have influenced governing behaviour.

Reform UK

Reform councils have generally engaged pragmatically with combined authorities but have also experienced tensions with central government, particularly where policies attract political criticism. For example, proposals in Warwickshire related to SEND provision³⁸ and Derbyshire's proposed closure of care homes³⁹ and comments on SEND⁴⁰ each drew intervention from ministers.

Some divergence between local and national Reform UK party positions has also been apparent in some areas, for example relating to opposition to fracking⁴¹, and disagreement over council staff employment conditions such as working from home⁴² and pensions arrangements⁴³.

Green Party of England and Wales

Green-led councils have also engaged pragmatically with intergovernmental structures but have expressed concerns about top-down reforms, particularly in relation to local government reorganisation, emphasising the risks of reduced local accountability under larger unitary structures⁴⁴.

Conclusion

Intergovernmental relations are characterised by constraint and pragmatism across both party types, with political tensions arising primarily in relation to conflicts with central government policy and proposals for local government reorganisation. Both parties opposed the top-down imposition of Local Government Reorganisation.

European Cases and Literature Review

Our UK case study findings align closely with a growing body of European literature on challenger parties in local government. This literature highlights four recurring dynamics: the role of local government as a training ground, institutional constraints, the persistence of symbolic politics and ‘mainstreaming’ effects.

Local government is widely understood as a critical arena for challenger parties, providing opportunities for organisational development and policy experimentation^{45 46}. Empirical studies suggest that participation in local governance often moderates party behaviour, as actors adapt to institutional constraints and the practical demands of service delivery^{47 48}.

Institutional constraints play a central role in shaping outcomes. Statutory responsibilities, fiscal rules and administrative oversight limit the scope for radical policy change, encouraging pragmatic adaptation⁴⁹. This is particularly evident in consensual governance systems where power-sharing arrangements further constrain executive autonomy.

The literature also emphasises the importance of symbolic and performative politics, particularly for populist radical right parties. These actors often deploy highly visible policies to signal ideological commitments, even where substantive policy change is limited^{50 51}. The Rassemblement National, a populist right wing party in France, provides a prominent example, where local administrations have combined symbolic identity-based policies with an emphasis on fiscal competence and service delivery, reflecting a strategy of ‘mainstreaming’ aimed at enhancing electoral legitimacy^{52 53}.

European Green parties often have a strong emphasis on programme-based policy agendas centred on environmental sustainability and social justice⁵⁴. For example, Vauban, within the city of Freiburg in the south west of Germany, is an internationally recognised exemplar of sustainable development that is regularly identified as best practice in planning and other literature⁵⁵. This demonstrates a consistent strategy of embedding environmental objectives within mainstream planning, transport and housing systems, for example through integrated land-use and transport policy, low-energy housing standards and mixed-use urban development.

Overall, the UK evidence closely reflects these European patterns, reinforcing the view that challenger party governance is characterised less by transformative disruption than by constrained adaptation.

Implications for Councils

The experience of challenger-led councils has several important implications for local government practice in the context of the continued increase in the number of councils which are (wholly or partially) controlled by such parties.

First, institutional resilience appears strong. Existing governance frameworks have broadly absorbed the entry of challenger parties without significant disruption, though early periods of instability highlight the importance of effective induction and support for new members.

Second, member–officer relationships remain critical. Councils need to invest in maintaining constructive working relationships, particularly where political positions might challenge organisational norms or legal requirements.

Third, scrutiny and accountability mechanisms require continued support. In some cases, political tensions may place pressure on these systems, reinforcing the need for robust procedural safeguards.

Fourth, public engagement will remain an area of focus, particularly where policy changes require behavioural adjustments. Councils need to ensure that consultation processes are meaningful and that communication strategies are effective.

Implications for Challenger Parties

For challenger parties themselves, the evidence highlights several key challenges and opportunities.

First, local government provides a valuable training ground for party development, offering opportunities to build organisational capacity and demonstrate governing competence.

Second, the transition from opposition to governing requires rapid adaptation to institutional constraints and procedural norms. Parties without prior governing experience may face particular difficulties in this transition. It would be helpful for national challenger parties to provide supporting guidance and access to more experienced peer councillors for advice to new councillors.

Third, internal cohesion emerges as a significant factor. High levels of councillor turnover and internal conflict might impact on perceptions of governing effectiveness and credibility.

Finally, challenger parties entering government must reconcile their political narratives with the pragmatic demands of service delivery and government decision making.

Conclusions

This brief overview of the emerging findings of the first phase of this research project suggests that the experience of challenger parties in English local government has demonstrated both the resilience of institutional frameworks and the adaptability of political actors.

While some observers might have been concerned about major disruptive change, the early evidence suggests that governing experience has produced pragmatic adaptation rather than radical transformation. Institutional constraints, including national policy currently set by the Labour party, ongoing resource limitations and the practical demands of service delivery all act to moderate political actions.

Differences between Reform and Green administrations are evident, particularly in policy emphasis and governing style. Reform councils have prioritised cost control and symbolic policies⁵⁶ that 'communicate a message'⁵⁷ alongside some more substantive policy innovations and, in some cases, relatively high levels of early local political instability. Green councils also emphasise prudent financial management, and often have an emphasis on environmental and social agendas, collaborative governance and deliberative engagement.

However, these differences exist within a shared context of constraint and adaptation. Across challenger parties, local government functions as a training ground, a site of organisational learning, and a domain in which political identities are reshaped through the experience of governing.

This report is based on early findings from the first phase of this research project. Future phases are likely to include interviews with officers and members, together with more detailed financial and policy analysis.

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