



CheckCarbonFact

SUSTAINABILITY POSITIONING OF COMPANIES IN STAFFORDSHIRE

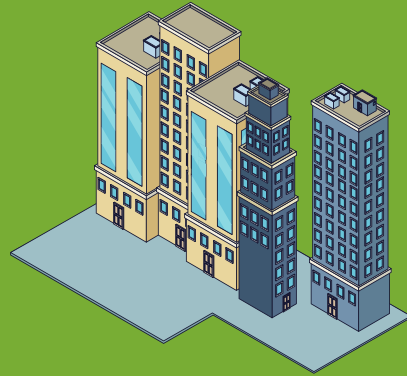
A Research by CheckCarbonFact
September 2023



REPORT SNAPSHOT



500 COMPANIES COVERED



8% SUSTAINABILITY POSITIONING POSTED ON WEBSITE



2% SUSTAINABILITY POSITIONING IMPLIED BUT NOT POSTED ON WEBSITE



90% NO SUSTAINABILITY POSITIONING POSTED ON WEBSITE



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Executive Summary

The positioning of companies on climate action and sustainability has become more and more imperative. Articulated and publicly provided policies on these not only show an understanding of contemporary ethical responsibility on environmental and broader societal impacts but also indicate the competitiveness and strength of companies.

These policies signpost a proactive risk management approach, thereby mitigating potential environmental, social, and regulatory risks. However, this research, which focused on the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG); Sustainability; Net Zero; and stand-alone Environmental Policies of 500 sampled companies listed in the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce (SCC) membership directory, reveals concerning trends.

A mere 8% of the companies published some form of environmental, climate, and sustainability policies visibly on their websites, while an overwhelming 90% do not have any such visible publication on their websites or other online spaces.

A sector-specific analysis of the data, however, demonstrates notable variations. For instance, the manufacturing sector takes the lead in published policies. This is followed by Real Estate, and the Financial/Insurance services sectors, indicating that environmental and sustainability considerations are becoming a central consideration in the built environment while also showing the direction of financial flows.

A key conclusion from the research is that the absence of visibly published climate action and sustainability policies suggests several vulnerabilities that may impair companies' ethical standing, competitiveness, and corporate governance – gaps that could ultimately impact the bottom line. Improperly articulated or undisclosed policies on climate action and sustainability open up companies to operational vulnerabilities, reputational risks, non-competitiveness, and potential regulatory compliance shortfalls.

Perceptive investors, business leaders, and managers will view the findings and recommendations of this research as a useful prompt to articulate and effectively communicate their climate action to their stakeholders and the general public.

The Value Proposition of this Research

In line with the urgent global imperative of mitigating the effects of climate change, companies are increasingly faced with the demand to be demonstrably climate-friendly. This goes beyond just professing sustainability and the publication of nice-reading policy documents but requires deliberate mainstreaming of key tenets into their value and supply chains. Failure to do so exposes them to greenwashing. Climate action and sustainability practices not only align with the urgency of environmental and planetary remediation and preservation but also de-risk and position companies to leverage potential benefits.

Such benefits include exposure to opportunities, including procurement opportunities, access to grants, trading schemes, tax waivers, and other business incentives. Conversely, failure to embrace sustainability increases the environmental risk quotients of companies as carbon emissions from their value and supply chains can significantly contribute to adverse climate impacts and consequent backlash from stakeholders, including customers and investors. This research therefore espouses the imperative for companies to embrace sustainability and climate action both in policy and practice as not doing so could attract costly consequence.





Reporting Boundaries

The information and data in this report pertain to companies listed in the membership directory of the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce (SCC) accessed on its website between July and August 2023 when the research was conducted. The information provided in this report pertains to the sustainability positioning of the sampled 500 companies that are members of the SCC.

The focus is on the visible publication of well-defined ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), Sustainability, Net-Zero (explicit decarbonisation commitments), and stand-alone Environmental policies by the sampled companies listed in the membership directory of the SCC.

The research categorized policy availability into three distinct groups, viz;

- **Published Policies:** Companies that have formally documented policies published on their websites and other online spaces. These policies clearly outline their commitment to climate action and sustainability practices and provide a clear framework for integrating those into their value and supply chains, including operations, production, product life-circle as well as end-of-life disposals.
- **No Published Policies:** Companies categorized in this group do not have any formal policy published on their website or other online spaces.
- **Implied but Unpublished Policies:** Companies in this category do not have policies published on their website but tend to show an awareness and/or inclination to sustainability through description of operational practices, for instance.

Introduction

In an era defined by growing environmental awareness and the pressing need to address climate change, the role of businesses has evolved beyond profit generation and the satisfaction of internal shareholders. Companies are now expected to be accountable for their environmental impact and are increasingly under scrutiny for subscription to climate and sustainability policies. As the global community intensifies its efforts to combat the far-reaching consequences of climate change, the emphasis on corporate responsibility and sustainable practices has never been more critical.

Central to these efforts are climate change policies, which outline guidelines, frameworks, standards, regulations, and commitments to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, transition to renewable energy sources, and promote sustainable practices across industries and value chains. As part of this collective response, companies are increasingly expected to adopt and adhere to climate change policies that align with global goals such as the Paris Agreement and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



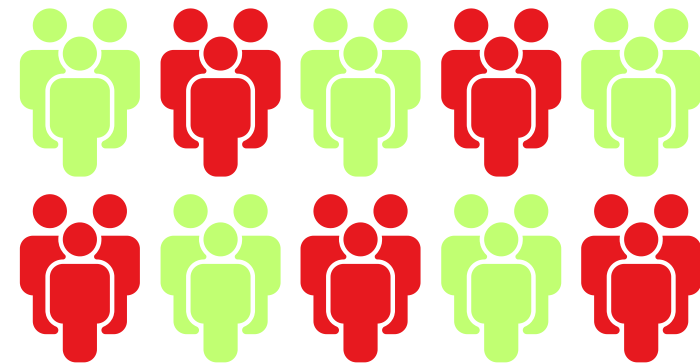
Global Outlook: Climate Inequality and Corporate Responsibility

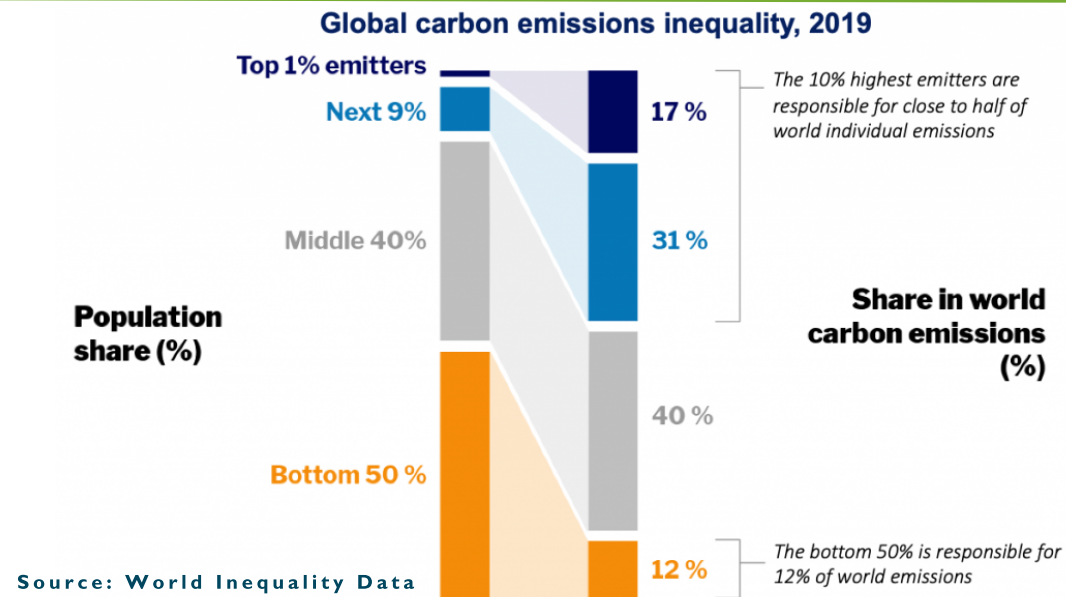
Global climate inequality is a pressing challenge that threatens to reverse progress made in reducing poverty and increasing global economic growth. The Paris Agreement, signed in 2015, acknowledges the need to address inequality in climate action and its potential to undo progress in reducing poverty and global economic disparities. The evidence points to a stark reality: climate change disproportionately affects the poorest regions and people worldwide.

According to the World Bank, climate change could push an additional 68 million to 135 million people into poverty by 2030 (GUIVARCH et al., 2021). This alarming projection highlights the threat climate change poses to the eradication of extreme poverty.

It is not only among countries that the impacts of climate change are causing inequality as evidence also shows worsening existing inequalities within countries. Vulnerable communities, particularly those in the poorest economies, often depend directly on sectors like agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, which are most vulnerable to climate change. Rising temperatures further exacerbate disparities in access to clean water and affordable food, and the poorest often lack access to insurance mechanisms and basic health services, making them exceptionally vulnerable to climate shocks.

Climate Change could result in
MORE THAN 100
MILLION
additional people living in
POVERTY by 2023





One striking aspect of global climate inequality is the stark disparity in greenhouse gas emissions. At the individual level, the distribution of emissions is highly skewed, with the top 10% of global emitters, constituting 771 million individuals, emitting an average of 31 tonnes of CO₂ per person annually and being responsible for approximately 48% of total global CO₂ emissions. In contrast, the bottom 50%, comprising 3.8 billion

individuals, contribute a mere 12% of global carbon emissions, averaging just 1.6 tonnes per person. The top 1% of emitters globally are particularly significant, accounting for 17% of annual CO₂ emissions, with an average emission rate of 110 tonnes per person.

This global inequality in per capita emissions results from substantial variations in both average emissions between countries and even larger

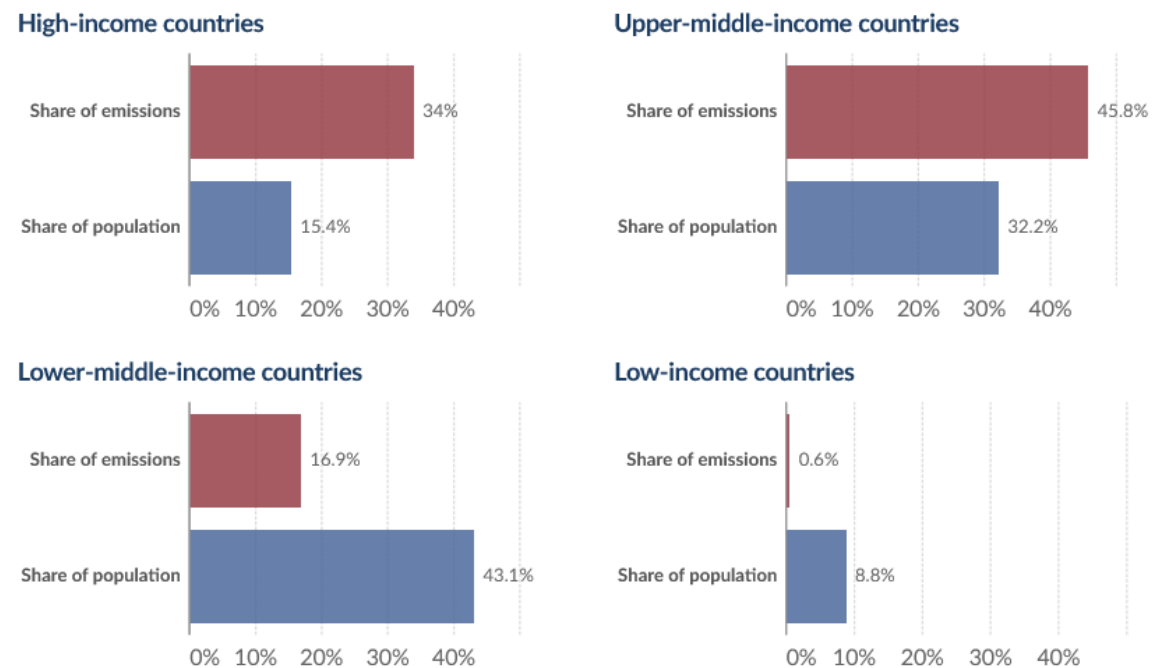
disparities in emissions within each country. For instance, Europe and North America have high averages (around 10 and 20 tonnes of CO₂ per person annually), China's average is 8 tonnes, while Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have lower averages (2.6 and 1.6 tonnes per person, respectively).

The chart depicted below presents both metrics across four income groups as categorized by the World Bank. This classification primarily relies on a country's income level and does not account for variations in emissions within individual countries, which can be as substantial as the differences observed between countries.

The chart highlights a significant disparity: high- and upper-middle-income nations, when combined, contribute a considerably larger proportion of emissions compared to their respective population sizes. Despite these countries representing slightly less than half of the global population, their collective emissions amount to over 80% of the world's CO₂ emissions.

In contrast, lower-middle and low-income countries demonstrate a contrasting pattern. The total emissions from the lower half of income groups constitute less than 20% of global emissions. Additionally, the least affluent countries contribute less than 1% of the total global CO₂ emissions.

This historical inequality is deeply rooted, with developed economies contributing more to the accumulation of greenhouse gases over time. For instance, the United States, the European Union, China, and India have varying degrees of historical contributions to cumulative emissions. To combat climate change, the Paris Agreement sets temperature targets to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius and aims for 1.5 degrees Celsius. Achieving these goals necessitates rapid and transformative policy changes across countries and organisations alike, including companies



OurWorldInData ((Ritchie et al., 2020) | Global inequalities in CO₂ emissions

The UK Economy at a Glance

The United Kingdom is home to one of the world's most diverse and advanced economies, characterized by a multifaceted landscape of industries. However, the UK economy, like many other economies, experienced very significant shocks during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic triggered an unprecedented upheaval, as evidenced by shifts in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). During the period from April to June 2020, which marked the peak of the initial national lockdown, GDP experienced an extraordinary decline of 19.4%. However, as the country gradually reopened during the summer, GDP recorded a remarkable rebound of 17.6% (ons.gov.uk, 2022). This magnitude of fluctuation in GDP had not been observed since the initiation of ONS (Office for National Statistics) measurements in 1955. The chart below provides an overview of the UK GDP growth trend from 1955-2022 (Covid-19 aftermath), showing a significant downward trend in 2020.

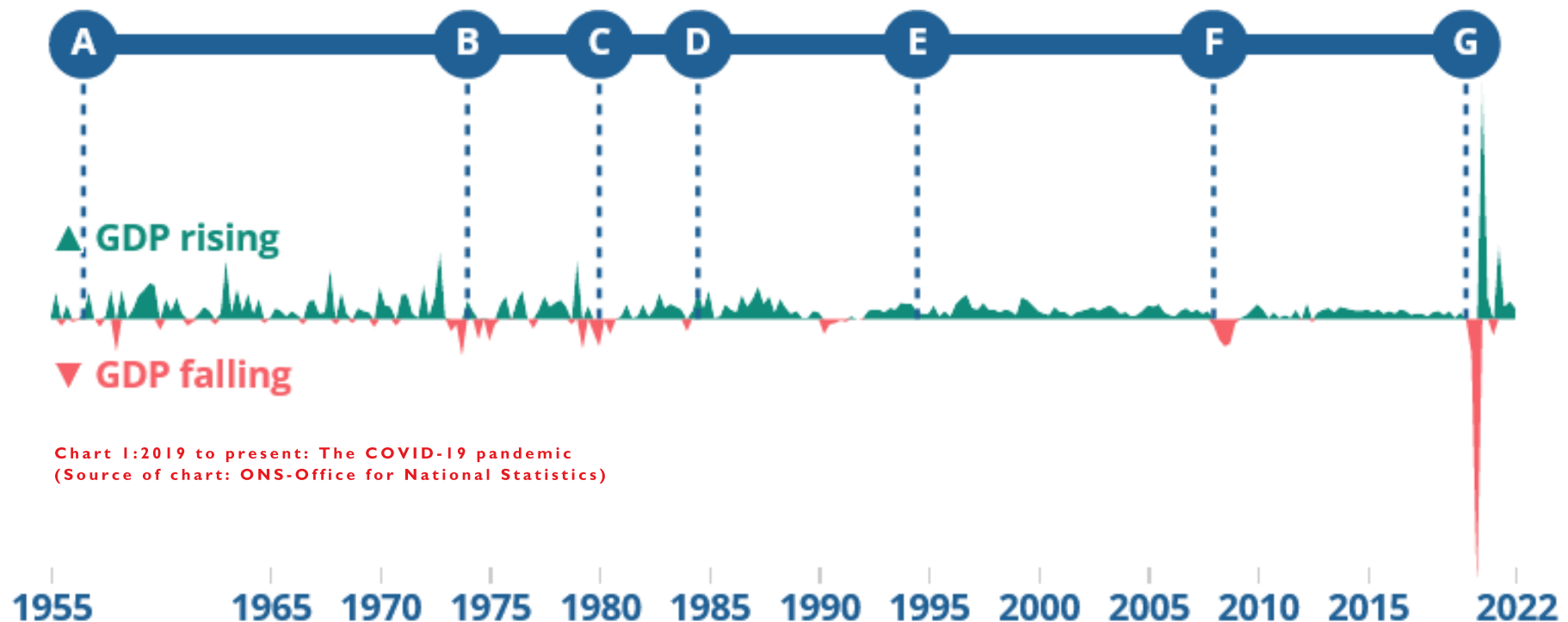


Chart 1: 2019 to present: The COVID-19 pandemic
(Source of chart: ONS-Office for National Statistics)



UK Climate Change Outlook

The United Kingdom was quick to emerge as a leader in global endeavours to combat climate change, with a series of comprehensive policies and commitments designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. One such landmark initiative is the Climate Change Act of 2008, representing a pioneering move in legislation. This Act legally binds the UK to an ambitious goal of slashing carbon emissions by a minimum of 80% by 2050, relative to 1990 levels. Additionally, a significant stride was taken in 2019 when the UK made history by committing to achieve Net Zero by 2050, cementing its dedication to achieving a balance between emissions and removals through a range of measures.

To attain the ambitious goal of Net Zero emissions by 2050, the UK has undertaken a multifaceted strategy. A key component of this strategy is a transition towards renewable energy sources. Substantial investments have been channelled into renewable energy, notably in offshore wind farms and solar power, to supplant fossil fuels in electricity generation. Nuclear power also occupies a crucial role within the low-carbon energy mix.

There have, however, been concerns recently that the UK is slipping off its leadership role on climate change. The government has come under criticism from various quarters that the country is dropping the ball on key net zero commitments and rolling back on initiatives to advance its leadership.



CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE (CCC) REPORT AS ALARM BELL

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) publishes an annual evaluation of the UK's advancement toward attaining net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. The 2022 Progress Report published in June 2023 confirmed fears that the country has dropped the ball on its global leadership on climate change. The CCC's report reveals a troubling slowdown in net-zero delivery over the past year, citing a lack of leadership and critical gaps in areas like energy demand reduction.

While there are some positive signs, such as growing electric vehicle sales and renewable energy deployment, the report stresses the need for greater urgency, saying the UK's 2050 net-zero target lacks a sustained programme of action.

Additionally, the report calls for more transparency, coordination, and public engagement to address cross-cutting solutions and barriers to low-carbon choices, emphasizing the importance of committed policies to secure investment and global leadership in the transition to net zero.^[1]

^[1]<https://www.ice.org.uk/news-insight/news-and-blogs/ice-blogs/the-infrastructure-blog/uk-progress-on-net-zero-is-slowng-warns-ccc> (Accessed: 22 September 2023).

Staffordshire at a Glance

Staffordshire is a landlocked county in the West Midlands, sharing borders with several neighbouring counties like Cheshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, and Warwickshire. The region is renowned for its profound historical significance, diverse landscapes, and notable contributions across a spectrum of industries. Over time, Staffordshire has experienced significant economic evolution and growth, shaping its identity as a dynamic county with a rich heritage and multifaceted economic landscape. Staffordshire is characterized by a mix of urban and rural areas, with major cities including Stoke-on-Trent and Lichfield.

Staffordshire's economy has undergone significant changes over the years, transitioning from an agricultural focus to a region with a diverse economic landscape. While historical industries like pottery, mining, and manufacturing remain culturally important, the county has also embraced modern sectors such as services, tourism, and digital industries.

Recent reports indicate a positive trend in the county's economic performance. Insights from a 2023 Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Economic Bulletin and 2018 Economic Growth Report by the Staffordshire County Council revealed a drastic shift from the county's historical roots in industries like pottery and mining to embrace modern sectors, and recent data shows positive trends (staffordshire.gov.uk, 2018; staffordshire.gov.uk, 2023).

The economic outlook was cautiously optimistic, with concerns about inflation and global uncertainties. Continued support for businesses and communities remained crucial given the ongoing economic uncertainties.

Staffordshire Climate Action

Staffordshire County Council has a Climate Change Action Plan for the period, 2021-2025 (staffordshire.gov.uk, 2022). This comprehensive strategy is aimed at reducing carbon emissions, and mitigating the effects of climate change while preparing communities and businesses for the challenges ahead.

The Strategic Development Framework, released in February 2021, serves as a blueprint for the Council's efforts to achieve its carbon emissions target. This framework outlines the Council's strategic approach to addressing climate change and integrates climate action into its decision-making processes.

The plan demonstrates the Council's commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and outlines a series of specific actions to attain this goal. Key highlights and components of the plan include:

1. Key Principles:

Climate change is identified as one of the five key principles in the Council's Strategic Plan. This underlines the Council's recognition of the urgency and significance of the phenomenon.

2. Emission Reduction commitment:

Staffordshire County Council has already made significant progress in reducing its carbon emissions, achieving a 43% reduction between 2018 and 2021. The Council's commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 underscores its determination to further reduce its carbon footprint.

3. Waste Management and Outreach:

The Council's plan includes initiatives such as rolling out a carbon calculator for businesses. These actions address waste management and raise awareness of carbon impacts among businesses.

4. Completed and New Actions:

The Climate Change Action Plan includes: incorporating climate change considerations into standard templates; conducting a Renewable Energy Audit; establishing climate change as a standing agenda item for relevant groups; engaging consultants to assess carbon sequestration/storage in natural habitats; promoting tree planting and habitat enhancement to increase carbon storage; and Implementing a countywide strategic direction to transition to Net Zero.

5. Decision-Making Integration:

The plan emphasizes integrating climate change and sustainability impacts into various decision-making processes, such as budget allocation and land disposals. This ensures that climate considerations are central to the Council's operations.

6. Resource Allocation:

The Council is committed to providing the necessary resources to support businesses in understanding their carbon impacts and identifying opportunities for reduction. This reflects the Council's dedication to promoting carbon reduction across its functions. The plan also incorporates measures to consider climate impacts in procurement processes and to encourage innovation in delivering low-carbon alternatives. This demonstrates the Council's commitment to sustainable practices and its role as a driver of positive change.

Brief on the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce

Since 1813, the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce (SCC) has strived to increase the prosperity of, and the opportunities for the people of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire by helping members to be connected, ethical, and effective. SCC's mission is to propel economic prosperity while adhering to ethical principles and driving innovation in alignment with the United Nations (UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)).

Accredited by the British Chambers, SCC extends its reach from local to international spheres, advocating for the interests of its members. It plays a pivotal role in Staffordshire's economic landscape by serving as a dynamic catalyst for business development and growth. As a prominent advocate for the local business community, the Chamber champions the interests of enterprises and entrepreneurs, acting as a bridge between businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders.

Through its extensive network of events, and networking opportunities, the Chamber fosters collaboration and knowledge-sharing among businesses, thereby fostering synergies that contribute to economic expansion.

By promoting Staffordshire's strengths and opportunities, facilitating international trade, and providing valuable business intelligence, the Chamber actively contributes to the county's economic growth and competitiveness. Furthermore, its involvement in skills development, community engagement, and advocacy ensures that Staffordshire remains a vibrant and thriving hub for businesses of all sizes, shaping the region's economic trajectory for the future.

Key Research Findings

Policy Status Of Sampled Companies

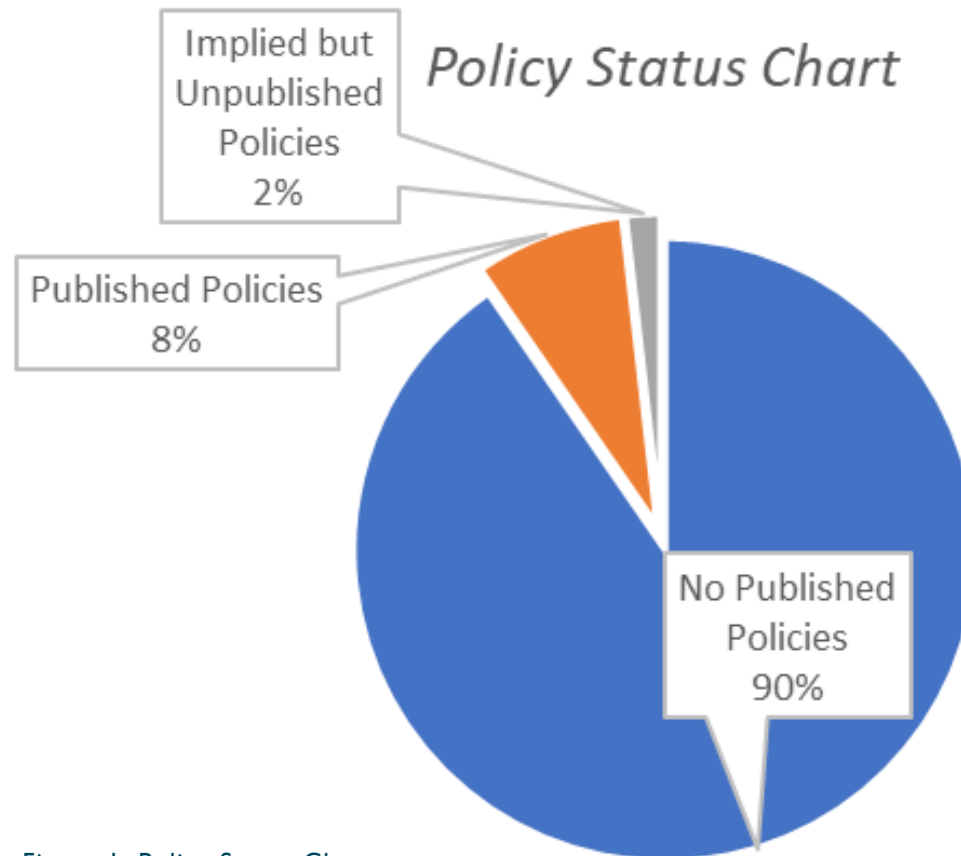


Figure 1: Policy Status Chart

Figure 1 offers a visual representation of the sustainability policy status of 500 companies based in Staffordshire. This evaluation centers on entities that have prominently displayed Sustainability/ESG/Net Zero/Environmental policies on their official websites and other owned digital spaces.

Key Research Findings: Policy Status Of Sampled Companies

Earlier sections of this research report have already established the fact that beyond financial gains, adherence to sustainability requirements is a legitimate expectation of stakeholders - customers, investors, and employees. It also enhances a company's viability, credibility and competitiveness while aiding in regulatory compliance and facilitation of access to funding from ESG-conscious investors.

The chart (**Fig 1**) shows a significant disparity in policy articulation and publication among the companies sampled. Specifically, only 8% (39 companies) of the sampled entities have published a form of climate action policy on their websites, signifying a demonstrated commitment to transparent sustainability practices. Conversely and significantly, a whopping 90% (452 companies) of the surveyed companies do not present any policy on their websites or other owned online space. Interestingly however, while 2% (9 companies) do not have a formal policy published, they imply some sustainability consciousness as indicated in explanations regarding their operations, products, and services.

This finding has implications for the business community in Staffordshire. The 8% with published policies demonstrate a proactive approach, potentially enjoying a competitive edge by appealing to environmentally conscious stakeholders and sustainability-driven investors. The 2% indicating sustainability without any published policies highlight the need for clear communication of their efforts, as, without an articulated and published policy framework, touted credentials become susceptible to doubts and allegations of greenwashing.

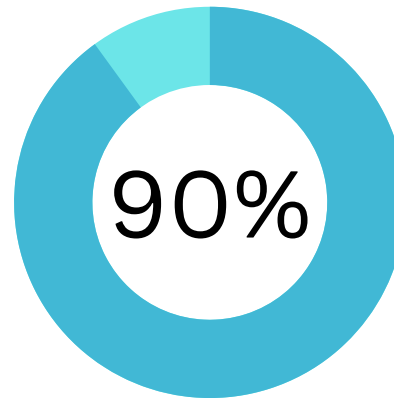
Notably, the substantial 90% without explicitly published policies face reputational risks, potentially alienating sustainability-focused investors and environmentally-driven stakeholders. They also obviously miss out on the benefits of being ethical and in strategic alignment with global environmental concerns.

Surprisingly, within this group of companies lacking clearly documented policy frameworks, there are those directly operating within the environmental sector, such as heavy-duty manufacturing and construction companies.

This surprising observation calls attention to a potential inconsistency between the operational nature of these companies and their approach to the environment and the well-being and future of societies (including their host communities).

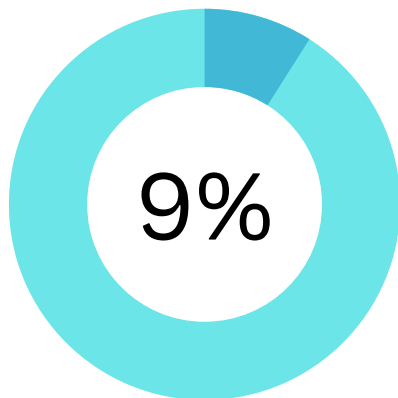
The observations above have far-reaching implications, pointing to serious gaps in awareness, communication, or implementation of sustainable practices within these companies, warranting further investigation. Additionally, it underscores the important connection between business operations and the articulation of sustainable policies, highlighting potential nuances that might influence policy adoption.

No Published Policies



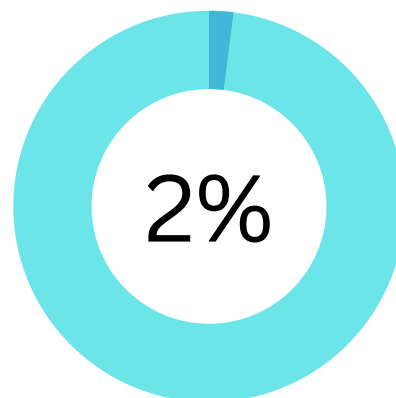
- **Reputational risks:** They face the risk of being perceived as indifferent or uncommitted to sustainability, which can alienate environmentally conscious stakeholders and investors.
- **Missed opportunities:** They miss out on the benefits of being seen as ethical and in alignment with global environmental concerns, which could impact their competitiveness.
- **Susceptibility to greenwashing allegations:** Without a clear policy framework, their sustainability efforts may be viewed with skepticism, and they could be accused of greenwashing.

Published Policies



- **Demonstrated commitment:** These companies show a proactive approach to sustainability and transparency, which can appeal to environmentally conscious stakeholders and sustainability-driven investors.
- **Competitive advantage:** They may enjoy a competitive edge by attracting customers who prioritize sustainability and ethical practices.
- **Reduced reputational risk:** They are less likely to face allegations of greenwashing because their policies are transparent and can be scrutinized.

Implied but Unpublished Policies



- **Lack of clear communication:** Their sustainability efforts are not articulated or communicated clearly, which can lead to misunderstandings or doubts among stakeholders.
- **Reputational risks:** Similar to companies with no published policies, they may be viewed as insincere or not fully committed to sustainability.
- **Reduced competitiveness:** They might miss out on opportunities to attract environmentally conscious customers and investors due to the absence of a clear commitment.

Key Research Findings: Disaggregated Findings by Sectors

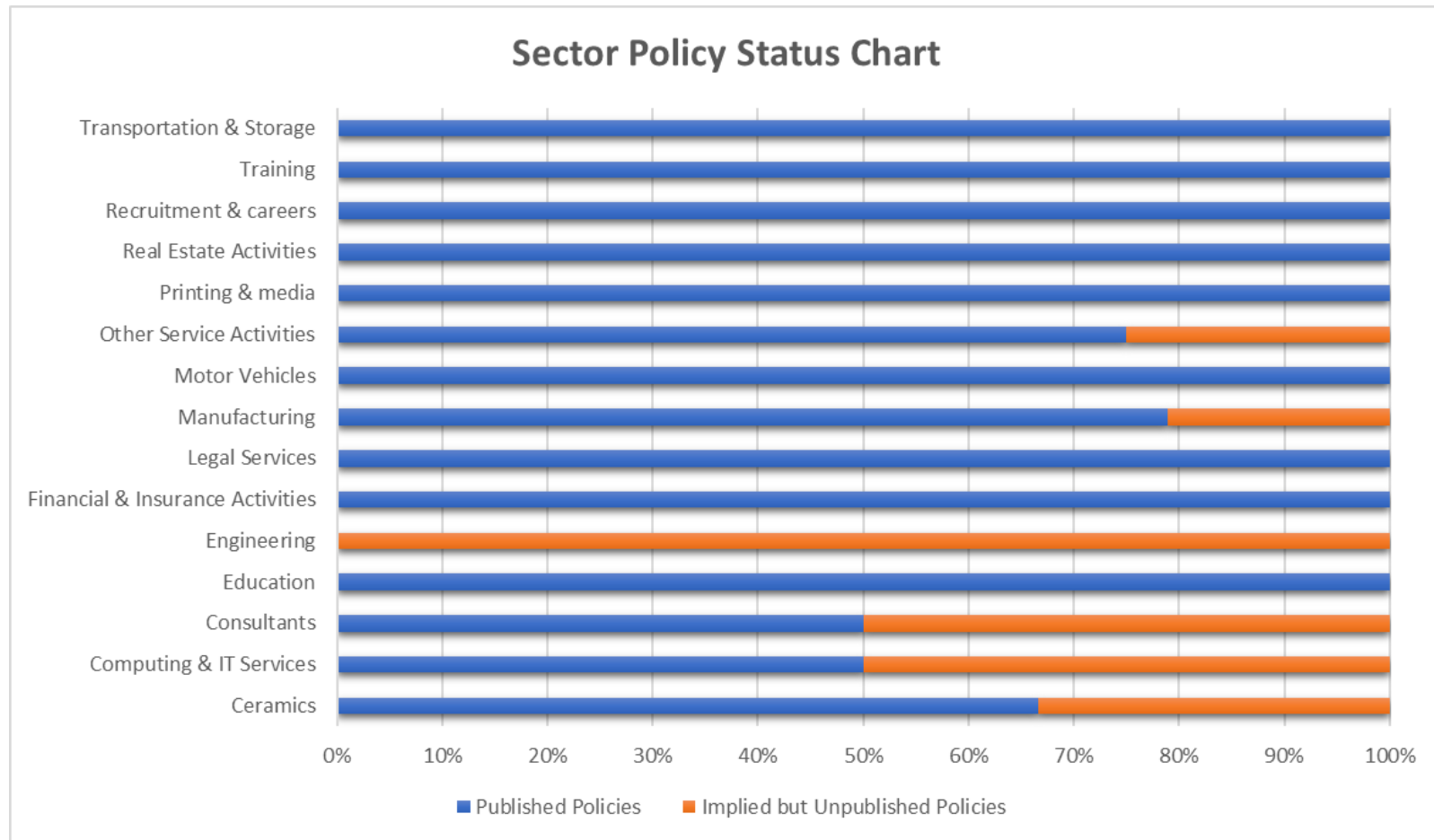


Figure 2 Sector Policy Status Chart

Figure 2 is a graphical representation that outlines the environmental/sustainability positioning across diverse sectors of the 500 companies sampled. Among the sectors analyzed, manufacturing emerges as a frontrunner, with 15 companies actively featuring articulated policies on their websites. This signifies a notable commitment to transparent sustainability practices within this sector. Following closely is Real Estate, boasting 4 companies with visible policies, and Financial & Insurance Activities, along with Other services, each with 3 companies displaying their sustainability positioning.

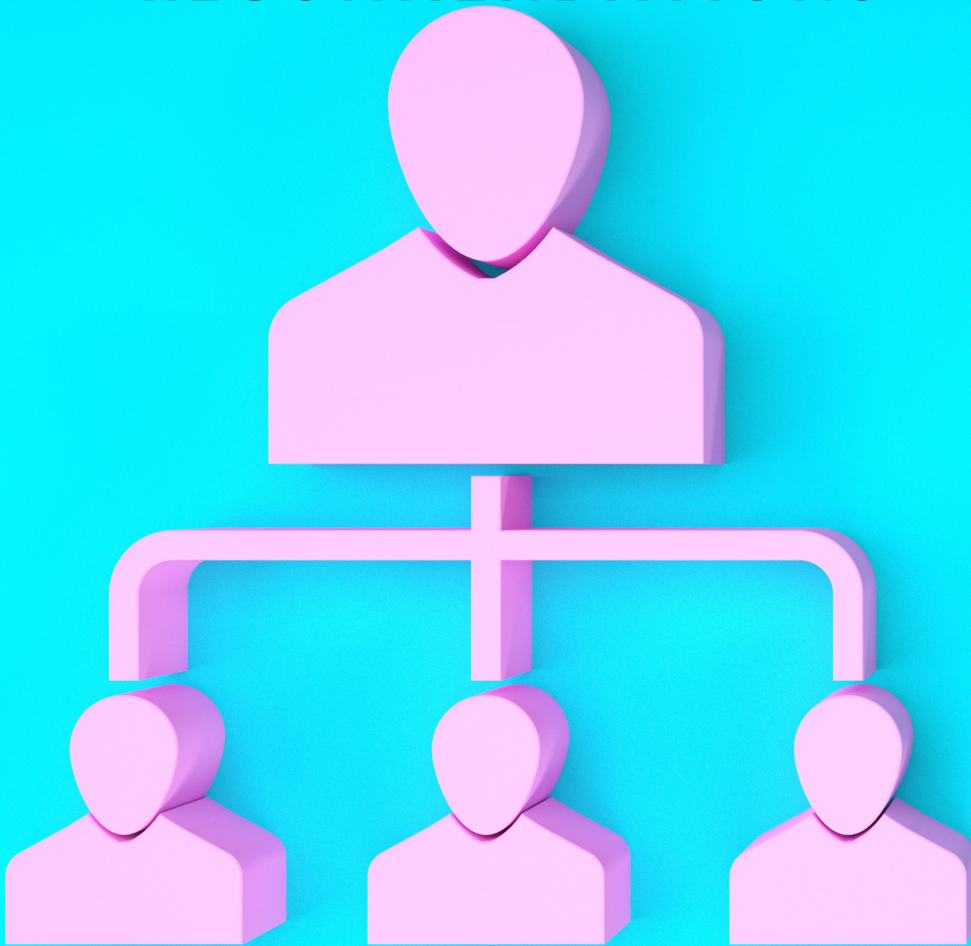
Meanwhile, the remaining sectors, totaling 14, exhibit varying levels of policy documentation and publication: some with just 2 (and even 1) companies. Interestingly, a substantial 25 out of the 39 sectors sampled do not show any companies with visibly published policies, even though 6 companies within these indicate an implied inclination to sustainability, albeit without a formal policy. This disparity in articulated policies by sector suggests significant implications.

The manufacturing sector's proactive engagement with the environment and sustainability indicates an industry-wide recognition of the benefits associated with the adoption of sustainability practices, including improved reputation and satisfactory stakeholder engagement. The Real Estate and Financial sectors' performance showcases notable efforts, but also hints at the need for more comprehensive policy frameworks. The absence of policies in a substantial number of sectors emphasizes the importance of promoting sustainability consciousness beyond the confines of certain industries.

Moreover, the place of sustainability-conscious companies (those without formal policies) clearly suggests a potential gap in awareness, contemporary business consciousness and/or effective communication- and this can possibly undermine brand reputation, and the credibility of their efforts as well as reduce competitiveness.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



The findings of this research underscore the necessity for businesses in Staffordshire, especially those under the auspices of the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, to prioritize the deliberate articulation, publication, and adoption of environmental and/or sustainability policies.

This is imperative for both ethical alignment and strategic guidance. Lacking a clearly documented policy not only jeopardizes a company's sustainability positioning but also signifies a void in the strategic guidelines governing its operations. This absence creates vulnerabilities and ambiguities that could compromise sustainable practices, leading to potential reputational risks and regulatory pitfalls. Consequently, businesses in Staffordshire must recognize the critical importance of articulating and upholding climate and sustainable policies as an integral component of their business framework.

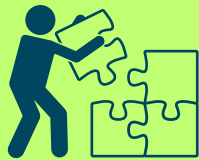
Such policies not only steer operational decisions but also offer a coherent roadmap for maintaining integrity and responsible practices in an increasingly sustainability-conscious business landscape.

Based on the findings of this research, CheckCarbonFact offers to advise entities on repositioning, so as to reap the immense benefits of being sustainable and compliant with contemporary climate action practices.

The advisories include the following specific services:



Bespoke climate risk assessment.



Capacity-building on Sustainability/ESG.



Articulate relevant and tailor-made environmental/sustainability policies.



Work with relevant stakeholders, including the county authorities and the SCC to raise climate and sustainability positioning of businesses in Staffordshire.



Provide guidance for companies to enhance their social value and commitment to community growth and safeguarding.

Conclusion

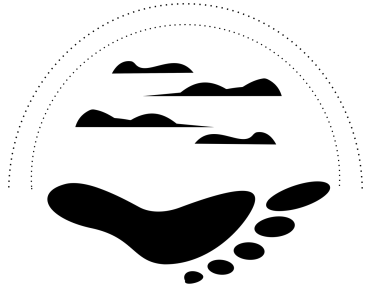
This research sheds light on the environmental/sustainability status of companies based in Staffordshire. It uncovers insights that hold the potential to shape the business landscape of the county. The global shift towards sustainability is no longer an option, but a necessity, as companies seek to navigate an environment where social and environmental responsibilities are paramount. The Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, as a key influencer and advocate for business growth, has a pivotal role to play in driving sustainable practices. By promoting clear sustainability policies, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and incentivizing responsible practices, the Chamber can catalyze positive change that not only benefits member companies but also contributes to a more sustainable, ethical, and prosperous future for the Staffordshire community and beyond.

About CheckCarbonFact

CheckCarbonFact is a social accountability platform for climate action by citizens, companies, and governments. It is a UK-based enterprise with a focus on engendering collective responsibility and mutual accountability in climate change mitigation and adaptation. The vision of CheckCarbonFact is to mobilize collective action in the race to save the planet; and the mission is to deter greenwashing, empower sustainable consumerism; and address climate inequities and inequality. CheckCarbonFact is a member of the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce.

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CheckCarbonFact

SUSTAINABILITY POSITIONING OF COMPANIES IN STAFFORDSHIRE



Proud to be a member of
Staffordshire
Chambers of
Commerce.

