

Bristol

The City of Bristol completed its [Voluntary Local Review \(VLR\)](#) in 2019, the first city in the United Kingdom to report on local progress for the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). Bristol's VLR summarizes SDG progress and challenges in the city, highlighting dozens of local initiatives and organisations working to make the city more sustainable. The VLR was developed as a baseline measure of the SDGs in the [One City Plan](#), "a city-wide approach for creating a fair, healthy, and sustainable community for all by 2050."

The VLR was prepared by researchers at the University of Bristol in close partnership with the City Office at Bristol City Council and members of the [Bristol SDG Alliance](#). The work was funded by the University of Bristol ESRC Impact Acceleration Account.

The information in this brief is based on the [Bristol VLR](#) and personal communications with the Bristol VLR team.

In 2015, United Nations Member States adopted the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) to guide global action on the urgent economic, social, and environmental challenges facing our planet. The creation of a [Voluntary Local Review \(VLR\)](#) is an effort by city and community leaders to confirm their commitment to the SDGs and present a holistic portrait of local sustainability work connected to the global [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).



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Summary of Key Aspects for the VLR Process



Collaboration

Bristol's Mayor, Marvin Rees, stressed from an early stage of his term the importance of collaboration throughout the community as a way to achieve the big sustainability challenges the city faced. Mayor Rees recognized the opportunity the SDGs presented as a common language for diverse city partners to come together to reflect a community-wide agenda and not one solely driven by the City government.

A strong SDG Alliance within Bristol was also an important component in mobilizing the community around the VLR. The Alliance is a network of city stakeholders covering many of Bristol's anchor institutions (e.g. universities, City Council officials, major businesses, and voluntary organizations and networks) working towards the implementation of the SDGs. This regular dialogue about the SDGs among organizations and networks has been a vital component in promoting the uptake of the SDGs in Bristol. Alliance members have also been able to apply for funding from the University of Bristol to support SDG localization efforts.



SDGs Implementation

Bristol reported on all 17 SDGs in the VLR, combining key statistical findings and trends with listings of organizations and specific initiatives working towards each SDG. The integration and mapping of the SDGs throughout Bristol's [One City Plan](#) acted as a backbone for the VLR, informing the statistical basis from which targets and indicators were compiled.

A city-wide consultation complemented the statistical review to help identify organizations in the community that were contributing towards the SDGs. The consultation was done through an online survey, asking respondents about the SDGs they were working towards and a series of questions about their scale of activity. The survey was shared widely by a variety of key community partners such as the SDG Alliance, the University of Bristol, the Black Southwest Network, and LGBT Bristol.

The VLR also came at a time when City leaders were exploring how to more deeply integrate the SDGs into City operations, including mapping to business plans and procurement policy, and establishing an SDG Ambassador within the Mayor's Cabinet.



Leaving No One Behind

The VLR acknowledges that many residents face serious systemic challenges and entrenched inequalities which, among other impacts, have led to youth and ethnic inequality within unemployment, disparity in access to higher education between local government wards, and premature deaths due to poor air quality. These inequalities and the ethos of the SDGs to 'leave no one behind' inspired the City in its efforts in the VLR and the One City Plan to rethink the way that city priorities are set and pursued.

Throughout the VLR, the City highlights a variety of initiatives aligned with the SDGs that aim to ensure no one is left behind, including:

- The Bristol Refugee Rights helps asylum seekers in Bristol receive support, avoid destitution and assist them in obtaining jobs ([SDG 1 - No Poverty](#)).
- 1625 Independent People is an organization that helps youth living in the care system and young unhoused people obtain access to employment ([SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth](#)).
- LGBT Bristol is working to raise awareness on discrimination faced by the LGBT+ community and partnering with the Bristol Hate Crime and Discrimination Service ([SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities](#)).



Political Buy-In

Leadership for the VLR came from Mayor Rees' Office and expanded to include the Policy, Strategy, Partnerships team, the City Office, and the International team. With strong buy-in for the SDGs across political parties, City Council explored a number of ways to integrate the SDGs into government operations, including mapping the SDGs to City business plans and procurement policy, establishing an SDG Ambassador within the Mayor's Cabinet, and establishing the Bristol City Funds to provide loans and grants to support key priorities in the One City Plan aligned to the SDGs.

The idea for the VLR came in 2017, when the Bristol SDG Alliance, the City Council Resilience Officer, and the Bristol Green Capital Partnership commissioned a relevancy assessment of the SDGs and their fit with the City's emerging strategic planning. This work helped garner further interest in the SDGs and led to formal partnerships and the creation of an SDG Research and Engagement Associate based at the University of Bristol (who later led the writing of the VLR).



Data Collection

The VLR includes a comprehensive review of statistical indicators which were informed by a prior mapping of the SDGs onto the One City Plan ([explore how the data structure was created here](#)). From the targets that were relevant to the One City Plan, the City compiled indicators from a range of sources (including eight city sustainability frameworks and existing sets of metrics and the [United Nations Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators](#)) and adapted those that were inappropriate to the city scale or unavailable with alternatives that reflect the ethos of the SDGs (adapting the [City of L.A.'s methodology](#)). Data was also gathered from other publicly available sources such as the Office for National Statistics or Public Health England. Wherever possible, data was benchmarked against 2010 to find sustained trends.

While the quality of the data in the VLR is considered very good, it is noted that much of the data relies on indicators at the regional level, making it difficult to identify inequalities within the city across wards. A key consideration for future VLR work identifies the need to develop deeper disaggregation of data and to consider how to better incorporate the de facto urban area that Bristol serves with the formal administrative boundaries of the city.

A Data Annex is also included in the appendix of the VLR, listing all 140 underlying data points with sources cited in the report. The Data Annex uses a traffic light analysis for each indicator identifying progress.



Accountability and Transparency

The City of Bristol created the [Bristol One City](#) website to track progress on the One City Plan and related SDGs. The site features a [dashboard of SDG targets](#) as they relate to targets in the One City Plan. Work on a separate data platform to track SDG progress and use local data points is also underway. The City has also been working to upload data and references included in the VLR to the [Office for National Statistics SDG portal](#). The Bristol City Office also regularly works to engage the community to generate insight and feedback on ways to continually improve on the One City Approach.

The City of Bristol and the University of Bristol also created a [VLR Handbook](#) to share the Bristol VLR experience and assist other cities in the UK to create their own VLR.

While reporting to the United Nations was not a primary driver for the VLR, the City was able to align itself with the [Voluntary National Review](#) process that the United Kingdom was undergoing at the time, joining the UK delegation at the UN and presenting the VLR in a variety of international forums and meetings.