

CATERING FOR EVERYONE

How far are councils across the UK catering for vegans?



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INTRODUCTION



Despite 40% of consumers saying they want plant-based alternatives and the vegan food market growing almost 10% in the last year,¹ vegans continue to face challenges in accessing healthy, nutritious food, with public sector menus frequently failing to consistently include a single vegan option.

This is particularly concerning given that veganism falls within the scope of human rights law² and vegans in the UK are protected under equality law.³ We believe local institutions – ranging from prisons and local council canteens to schools, hospitals and care homes – have a responsibility to improve their current plant-based offerings to accommodate the dietary needs of vegans. Furthermore, we are calling on local councils and the UK government to guarantee a nutritious plant-based option on every public sector menu that is made available to everyone, every day, without requiring people to make a special request.

Our Catering for Everyone campaign has worked for several years to improve the provision of vegan food. We also want to encourage public entities to offer vegan food to everyone, everywhere, everyday across all public services. Now, as the next stage of the campaign, we are focusing on understanding how many UK councils currently recognise veganism as a protected belief and whether they provide a

suitable number of good quality vegan food options on their menus. We want to encourage those institutions which are currently failing to accommodate the dietary needs of vegans to improve their catering provisions for those eating a vegan diet, as well as the large and growing number of people who wish to eat more sustainably.

To this end, we collected new data using Freedom of Information (FOI) requests that revealed how many councils across the UK currently provide vegan options on their menu and catering in other settings for which they are responsible. We also sought to understand whether councils recognise the connection between diet and climate, and whether councils are taking steps to reduce the consumption of environmentally damaging meat and dairy products. Our findings reveal which areas are excelling in this and which are falling behind. We hope it will be a useful tool to enable people to hold their local areas to account and push for more sustainable options. Ensuring that all public sector menus provide a 100% plant-based option every day is a crucial step towards vegan-inclusion across the UK and will encourage the transition to a more sustainable and healthier food system for all.

Claire Ogley

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¹ Anon, UK Vegan Food Market Grows 9.58% as 40% of Consumers Demand Plant-Based Options. *Vegconomist – the Vegan Business Magazine*, 23 March 2023 vegconomist.com/market-and-trends/uk-vegan-food-market-grows/ (accessed 18/08/2023)

² *W. v. the United Kingdom* [1993], ECHR, 18187/91, hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-1503%22%5D%7D, (Accessed 18/08/2023)

³ *Mr J Casamitjana Costa v The League Against Cruel Sports*, ET 3331129/2018 [gov.uk/employment-tribunal-decisions/mr-j-casamitjana-costa-v-the-league-against-cruel-sports-3331129-2018](https://www.gov.uk/employment-tribunal-decisions/mr-j-casamitjana-costa-v-the-league-against-cruel-sports-3331129-2018) (accessed 18/08/2023)



We have created this report to understand how many councils across the UK make demonstrable efforts to be inclusive of vegans by providing vegan food options and are taking steps to reduce meat and dairy consumption to meet environmental goals.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT?

This report works towards the mission of The Vegan Society, which is to make it easier for people to go and stay vegan, and to encourage the legal, cultural and policy changes necessary to transition to a food system that is kinder for humans, animals and the environment. A shift in our collective attitudes and practices is necessary to create the conditions for veganism to be an accessible lifestyle for all. Local authorities can play a key role by providing more and better vegan food options on their menus, which may be in their onsite canteens, at catered events or in any setting for which they are responsible, such as

schools, libraries or care homes.

We have created this report to understand how many councils across the UK make demonstrable efforts to be inclusive of vegans by providing vegan food options and are taking steps to reduce meat and dairy consumption to meet environmental goals.

This report will be useful as a resource to understand trends across the country, give people the tools they need to lobby for change in their local area and provide a means of tracking progress in years to come.

WHY SHOULD VEGANS BE INCLUDED?

Veganism is a way of living that seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.

Veganism is protected under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 9 grants everyone the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and public bodies must ensure that they do not unlawfully interfere with the right of vegans to practise their beliefs. The Convention rights are brought into the UK in the

form of the Human Rights Act 1998. The Human Rights Act explicitly states that a public authority must not act in a way that is incompatible with a Convention right and an 'act' can include omitting to act in an appropriate way.⁴

Ethical veganism is also a protected characteristic under UK equality law and therefore local authorities and other service providers have a legal obligation to respect the rights of vegans and a duty to avoid discrimination. In the interests of equality and respect for the rights afforded to

⁴ Human Rights Act 1998 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42 (accessed 18/08/2023)

vegans, we are calling for high-quality, nutritious vegan options to be available every day on public sector menus as standard.

Discrimination against a person due to a protected characteristic, including their beliefs, is explicitly prohibited under the Equality Act. Indirect discrimination is also prohibited and this should be taken seriously by public sector caterers, such as local councils. All public sector entities are under an additional legal duty to do more than merely avoid discrimination. They are legally required to examine the impact of their policies on those with protected characteristics and must therefore take positive steps to eliminate discrimination against vegans. Providing at least one vegan option on request is an absolute minimum to avoid claims being made under human rights and equality law, but we also want to encourage public sector caterers to go further. We want to see at least one vegan option on every public sector menu as standard.

While this can seem abstract when set in legal language, the personal impact of failing to adequately cater for vegans is very real. A Croydon councillor spells out the challenges she has faced in her workplace:

 ***The catering for vegans at Croydon Council is frustratingly poor. There's a lot of people working at the council who – like me – are doing their best to make choices that limit our impact on the climate, while respecting animal rights and welfare. It can be a real struggle when public bodies – like local councils – aren't even getting the basics***

VEGAN FOOD CAN BENEFIT EVERYONE

A shift in public catering towards vegan diets is not just beneficial to vegans alone. Plant-based food can be enjoyed by a wide range of people. Vegetarians, pescatarians, flexitarians, or

right. If they were, far more people would feel empowered to make ethical and sustainable choices.

I've been a councillor here for over a year and there's only one place which is convenient to get food on site but it's not advertised well: I'm not sure of the opening times. Some of the food is vegan sometimes but it's not always labelled obviously. There's nowhere vegans at Croydon Council can reliably eat. This means we have to plan and prepare every time we go into work.

There are a range of events hosted by the council and the catering situation is similar. Some of the food is vegetarian, not vegan, but it's rarely properly labelled, even for allergens, and the staff usually won't know either. I'd love to be able to break bread with my colleagues, but unfortunately the lack of inclusive options means we can't have those shared experiences. It's hard not to feel excluded. It's not something most of our non-vegan colleagues ever have to think about. This is especially frustrating as Croydon has a very diverse food culture, including many dishes that are vegan by default.

The opaque council structure makes it hard to know who to even complain to in order to get this changed. It would be so easy to make vegans and those with similar dietary needs feel catered for and included, with a really positive impact on our lives, on the planet, and for animals.

anyone else who may be looking to reduce their consumption of animal products can benefit from increased sustainable options. A vegan diet is inclusive and is often suitable for people with



We want to encourage all public bodies to recognise that an increase in plant-based food options will also support their environmental initiatives and targets.

religious dietary requirements, such as those who follow the Islamic, Jewish or Hindu faiths.

Wholefood plant-based food is often healthy too, as it is typically high in fruit and vegetables, meaning less saturated fat and plenty of dietary fibre. The British Dietetic Association and the National Health Service (NHS) both recognise that well-planned vegan diets can support healthy living at all ages. A substantial body of research

has linked vegan diets with lower blood pressure and cholesterol, as well as lower rates of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer⁵. Building familiarity with vegan food in public sector settings could help more people choose these options and help to address some of the many diet-related public health crises affecting the UK and putting additional strain on the NHS.⁶

WHY VEGAN FOOD IS KEY TO SOLVING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Our call for councils and other service providers to proactively cater for vegans is not only important to avoid discrimination against vegans; there are also important environmental issues to consider. We want to encourage all public bodies to recognise that an increase in plant-based food options will also support their environmental initiatives and targets.

Parliament, as well as the vast majority of UK local authorities across the country, have declared a climate emergency.⁷ Action plans have been


drawn up and targets have been set. The UK government has committed in law to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Local authorities in all parts of the UK have published their own commitments and action plans to do their part to fight the climate crisis. However, a recognition of the environmental impact of animal agriculture is often absent from these plans and from the broader conversation.

Transitioning away from animal agriculture is essential in the fight against climate change.

⁵ Key TJ, Papier K & Tong TYN. Plant-based diets and long-term health: findings from the EPIC-Oxford study. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 2022; 81: 190–198, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0029665121003748> (accessed 18/08/2023)

⁶ The Vegan Society 2022 About the Campaign Available www.vegansociety.com/take-action/campaigns/catering-everyone/information-news/about-campaign (accessed on 18/08/2023)

⁷ Climate Emergency Declaration. *Climate emergency declarations in 2,339 jurisdictions and local governments cover 1 billion citizens*, 21 July 2023, climateemergencydeclaration.org/climate-emergency-declarations-cover-15-million-citizens/ (accessed 18/08/2023)



Beef-farming is a key driver of deforestation, with over 40% of global deforestation resulting from the expansion of grazing land for cattle. Crops grown for animal feed, including soy, represent another key driver of deforestation.

The food we eat is responsible for a third of greenhouse gas emissions globally,⁸ with research finding that practising a vegan diet can reduce an individual's food-related emissions by 75%.⁹ With that in mind, it is essential that governments and local authorities use their position to promote plant-based diets as the most sustainable dietary model.

Abstaining from animal products will not only help to control harmful emissions of carbon dioxide, but will also reduce the other harmful environmental impacts of modern agriculture. Cattle-farming is not only a significant source of methane, a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon dioxide, but also has the largest water footprint of any food source. In fact, beef

production uses six times more water than growing pulses (e.g. chickpeas, beans, lentils),¹⁰ which are key sources of protein in a plant-based diet.

Beef-farming is a key driver of deforestation, with over 40%¹¹ of global deforestation resulting from the expansion of grazing land for cattle. Crops grown for animal feed, including soy, represent another key driver of deforestation.¹² International demand for animal products and animal feed is driving this devastation, which is hampering efforts to tackle the joint climate and biodiversity crises. A shift to a plant-based diet would reduce pressure on our valuable forests and help fix our broken food system.

⁸ Crippa M, Solazzo E, Guizzardi D, Monforti-Ferrario F, Tubiello FN & Leip A. Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. *Nature Food* 2021; 2: 198–209, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00225-9> (accessed 18/08/2023)

⁹ Scarborough P, Clark M, Cobiac L, Papier K, Knuppel A, Lynch J, Harrington R, Key T & Springmann M. Vegans, Vegetarians, fish-eaters, and meat-eaters in the UK show discrepant environmental impacts. *Nature Food* 2023; 3: 565–574, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-023-00795-w> (accessed 18/08/2023)

¹⁰ Food Water Footprint *Do you know how much water was used to grow your food and to produce your clothes and the things you buy?* www.waterfootprint.org/time-for-action/what-can-consumers-do/#productwater-footprint-crop-and-animal-products/ (accessed 18/08/2023)

¹¹ The Vegan Society. *Plate-up for the planet*, <https://www.plateupfortheplanet.org/follow-the-science/deforestation> (accessed 18/08/2023)

¹² Ritchie H. *Cutting down forests: what are the drivers of deforestation?* 23 February 2023 ourworldindata.org/what-are-drivers-deforestation#:~:text=Three%2Dquarters%20of%20deforestation%20is,oil%2C%20soy%20and%20logging%20industries. (accessed 18/08/2023)

WHY SHOULD LOCAL AUTHORITIES LEAD THE WAY ON SUSTAINABLE DIETS?

Local authorities must take a leadership role in addressing the environmental cost associated with animal agriculture. Most local councils in the UK have declared a climate emergency, but few have fully translated the urgency of this crisis into their local food procurement policies. Some councils have made notable strides in this regard, but many could go much further.

The responsibility of local authorities to provide environmentally sustainable food provision is included as one of the 14 recommendations in the National Food Strategy, an independent review of the UK's food system commissioned by the UK government. The National Food Strategy states that the UK government should strengthen procurement rules so that taxpayer money is spent on healthy and sustainable food. The recommendation applies to all public sector organisations in light of the estimated 1.9 million meals that they provide each year.¹³ It is essential that these meals are inclusive, nutritious and flavourful, but also that public sector organisations cater with sustainability in mind.

Our research shows that one person in every three thinks that the government should be promoting vegan diets to tackle the climate

crisis.¹⁴ There is a clear need for central government and local authorities to step up and take the initiative on this issue. People turn to their elected representatives at all levels of government to provide leadership and solutions to the problems we face, yet the majority of local authorities are dragging their heels. This is an opportunity for councils across the UK to lead by example and shift to a plant-based diet and, by doing so, demonstrate a commitment to a more sustainable future and the health of their local community.

By developing this report, we hope to show local authorities that providing vegan food not only avoids discrimination against vegans in their catering services, but also contributes to addressing the environmental concerns associated with animal agriculture. Vegans should and must be adequately accommodated, but there is also a huge opportunity to increase sustainability by increasing the provision of vegan food. We hope that people across the UK will be able to use the findings in this report to become better informed about their rights regarding public sector catering and to use it as a tool for advocacy.

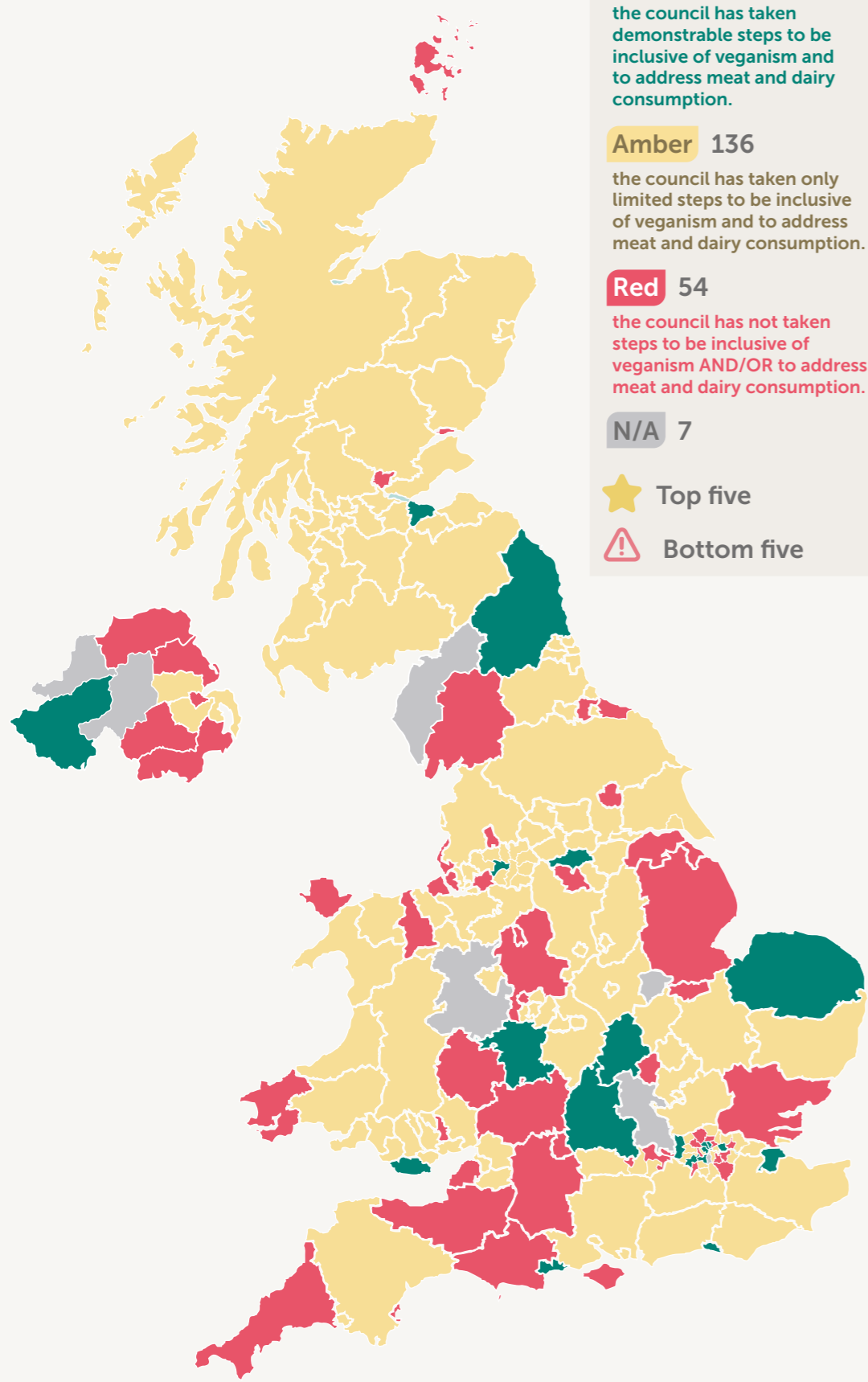
¹³ National Food Strategy *The National Food Strategy – The Plan*, 2021, nationalfoodstrategy.org/the-report/ (Accessed 18/08/2023)

¹⁴ The Vegan Society. *1 in 3 Brits think government should promote vegan diets to tackle climate crisis*, 9 March 2021, <https://www.vegansociety.com/news/news/1-3-brits-think-government-should-promote-vegan-diets-tackle-climate-crisis-0#:~:text=When%20asked%20what%20government%20officials,Programme%20survey%20on%20climate%20change.> (accessed 18/08/2023)

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THE UK AT A GLANCE



Green 19
the council has taken demonstrable steps to be inclusive of veganism and to address meat and dairy consumption.

Amber 136
the council has taken only limited steps to be inclusive of veganism and to address meat and dairy consumption.

Red 54
the council has not taken steps to be inclusive of veganism AND/OR to address meat and dairy consumption.

N/A 7

★ **Top five**

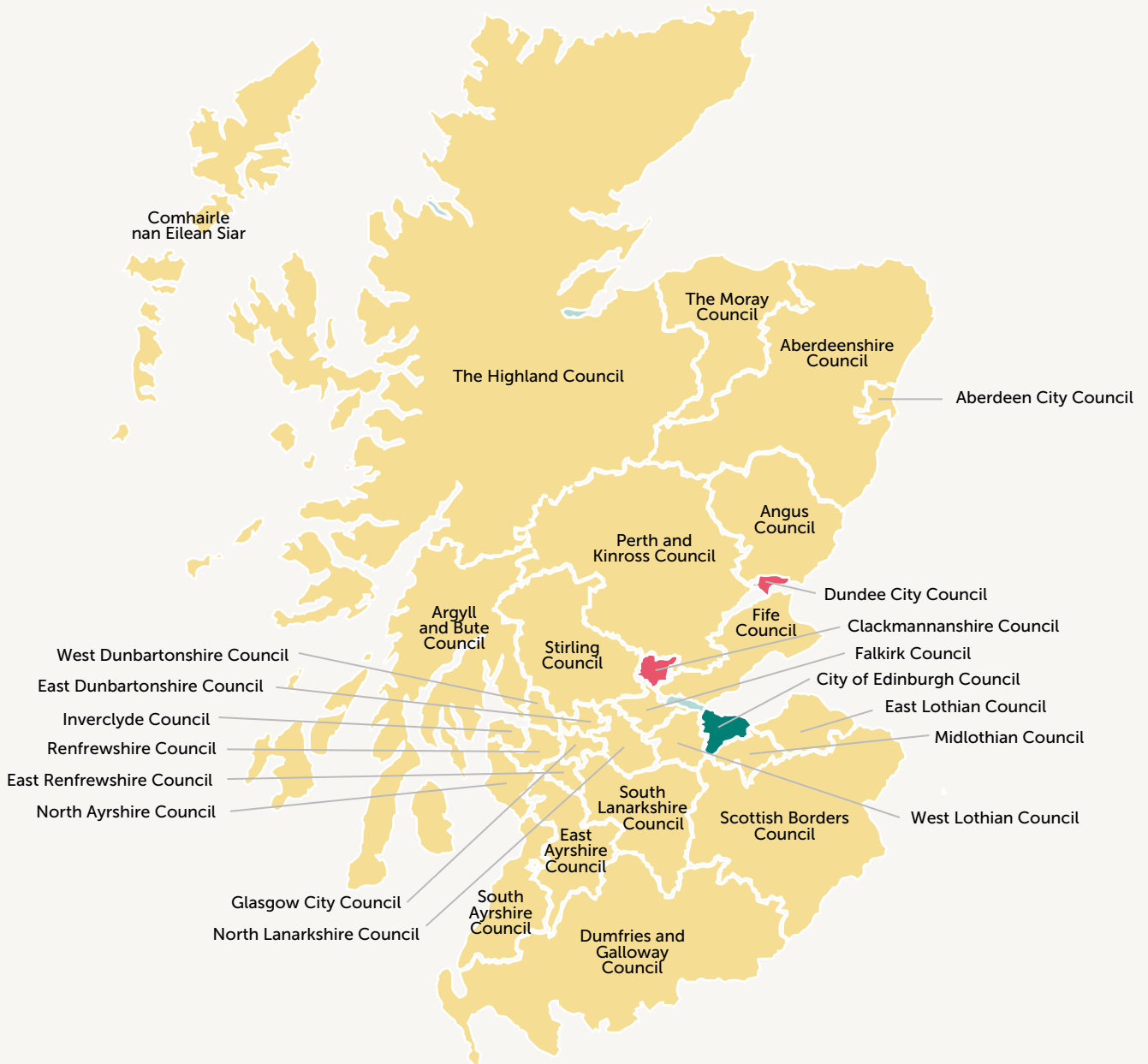
⚠ **Bottom five**

Councils

- Aberdeen City Council
- Aberdeenshire Council
- Angus Council
- Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Argyll and Bute Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Barking and Dagenham Council
- ⚠ ● Barnet Council
- Barnsley Borough Council
- Bath and North East Somerset Council
- Bedford Borough Council
- Belfast City Council
- Bexley Council
- Birmingham City Council
- Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
- Blackpool Council
- Blaenau Gwent County
- Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Blaenau Gwent)
- Bolton Borough Council
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
- Bracknell Forest Borough Council
- Bradford City Council
- Brent Council
- Bridgend County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr)
- Brighton and Hove City Council
- Bristol City Council
- Bromley Council
- Buckinghamshire Council
- Bury Borough Council
- Caerphilly County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Caerffili)
- Calderdale Borough Council
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Camden Council
- Cardiff Council (Cyngor Caerdydd)
- Carmarthenshire County Council (Cyngor Sir Gaerfyrddin)
- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Ceredigion County Council (Cyngor Sir Ceredigion)
- Cheshire East Council
- Cheshire West and Chester Council
- City and County of Swansea (Cyngor Sir a Dinas Abertawe)
- ★ ● City of Edinburgh Council
- City of York Council
- Clackmannanshire Council
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Conwy County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Conwy)
- Cornwall Council
- Coventry City Council
- Croydon Council
- Cumberland County Council
- Darlington Borough Council
- Denbighshire County Council (Cyngor Sir Dinbych)
- Derby City Council
- Derbyshire County Council
- Derry City and Strabane District Council
- Devon County Council
- Doncaster Borough Council
- Dorset Council
- Dudley Borough Council
- Dumfries and Galloway Council
- Dundee City Council
- Durham County Council
- Ealing Council
- East Ayrshire Council
- East Dunbartonshire Council
- East Lothian Council
- East Renfrewshire Council
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- East Sussex County Council
- Enfield Council
- Essex County Council
- Falkirk Council
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council - Enniskillen Office
- Fife Council
- Flintshire County Council (Cyngor Sir y Fflint)
- Gateshead Borough Council
- Glasgow City Council
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Greenwich Council
- Gwynedd Council (Cyngor Sir Gwynedd)
- Hackney Council
- Halton Borough Council
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Hampshire County Council
- Haringey Council
- Harrow Council
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- Havering Council
- Herefordshire Council
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Hillingdon Council
- Hounslow Council
- Hull City Council
- Inverclyde Council
- Isle of Anglesey County Council (Cyngor Sir Ynys Môn)
- Isle of Wight Council
- Islington Council
- Kensington and Chelsea Council
- Kent County Council
- Kingston upon Thames Council
- Kirklees Borough Council
- Knowsley Borough Council
- Lambeth Council
- Lancashire County Council
- Leeds City Council
- Leicester City Council
- Leicestershire County Council
- Lewisham Council
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Liverpool City Council
- Luton Borough Council
- Manchester City Council
- Medway Council
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Merthyr Tudful)
- Merton Council
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
- Mid Ulster District Council - Dungannon
- Middlesbrough Borough Council
- Midlothian Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- Monmouthshire County Council (Cyngor Sir Fynwy)
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Castell-nedd Port Talbot)
- Newcastle Upon Tyne City Council
- Newham
- Newport City Council (Cyngor Dinas Casnewydd)
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
- Norfolk County Council
- North Ayrshire Council
- North East Lincolnshire Council
- North Lanarkshire Council
- North Lincolnshire Council
- North Northamptonshire Council
- ⚠ ● North Somerset Council
- North Tyneside Borough Council
- North Yorkshire Council
- Northumberland County Council
- Nottingham City Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Oldham Borough Council
- ⚠ ● Orkney Islands Council
- ★ ● Oxfordshire County Council
- Pembrokeshire County Council (Cyngor Sir Penfro)
- Perth and Kinross Council
- Peterborough City Council
- Plymouth City Council
- Portsmouth City Council
- Powys County Council (Cyngor Sir Powys)
- Reading Borough Council
- Redbridge Council
- Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
- Renfrewshire Council
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- ★ ● Richmond upon Thames Council
- Rochdale Borough Council
- Rotherham Borough Council
- Rutland County Council
- Salford City Council
- Sandwell Borough Council
- Scottish Borders Council
- Sefton Borough Council
- Sheffield City Council
- Shetland Islands Council
- Shropshire Council
- ⚠ ● Slough Borough Council
- Solihull Borough Council
- Somerset Council
- South Ayrshire Council
- South Gloucestershire Council
- South Lanarkshire Council
- South Tyneside Borough Council
- Southampton City Council
- Southend Council
- Southwark Council
- St Helens Borough Council
- Staffordshire County Council
- Stirling Council
- Stockport Borough Council
- ⚠ ● Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- Suffolk County Council
- Sunderland City Council
- Surrey County Council
- Sutton Council
- Swindon Borough Council
- Tameside Borough Council
- Telford and Wrekin Borough Council
- The Highland Council
- The Moray Council
- ★ ● The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Bro Morgannwg)
- Thurrock Council
- Torbay Council
- Torfaen County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Torfaen)
- Tower Hamlets Council
- Trafford Borough Council
- Wakefield City Council
- Walsall Borough Council
- Waltham Forest Council
- ★ ● Wandsworth Council
- Warrington Borough Council
- Warwickshire County Council
- West Berkshire Council
- West Dunbartonshire Council
- West Lothian Council
- West Northamptonshire Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Westminster Council
- Westmorland and Furness Council
- Wigan Borough Council
- Wiltshire Council
- Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Council
- Wirral Borough Council
- Wokingham Borough Council
- Wolverhampton City Council
- Worcestershire County Council
- Wrexham County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Wrecsam)

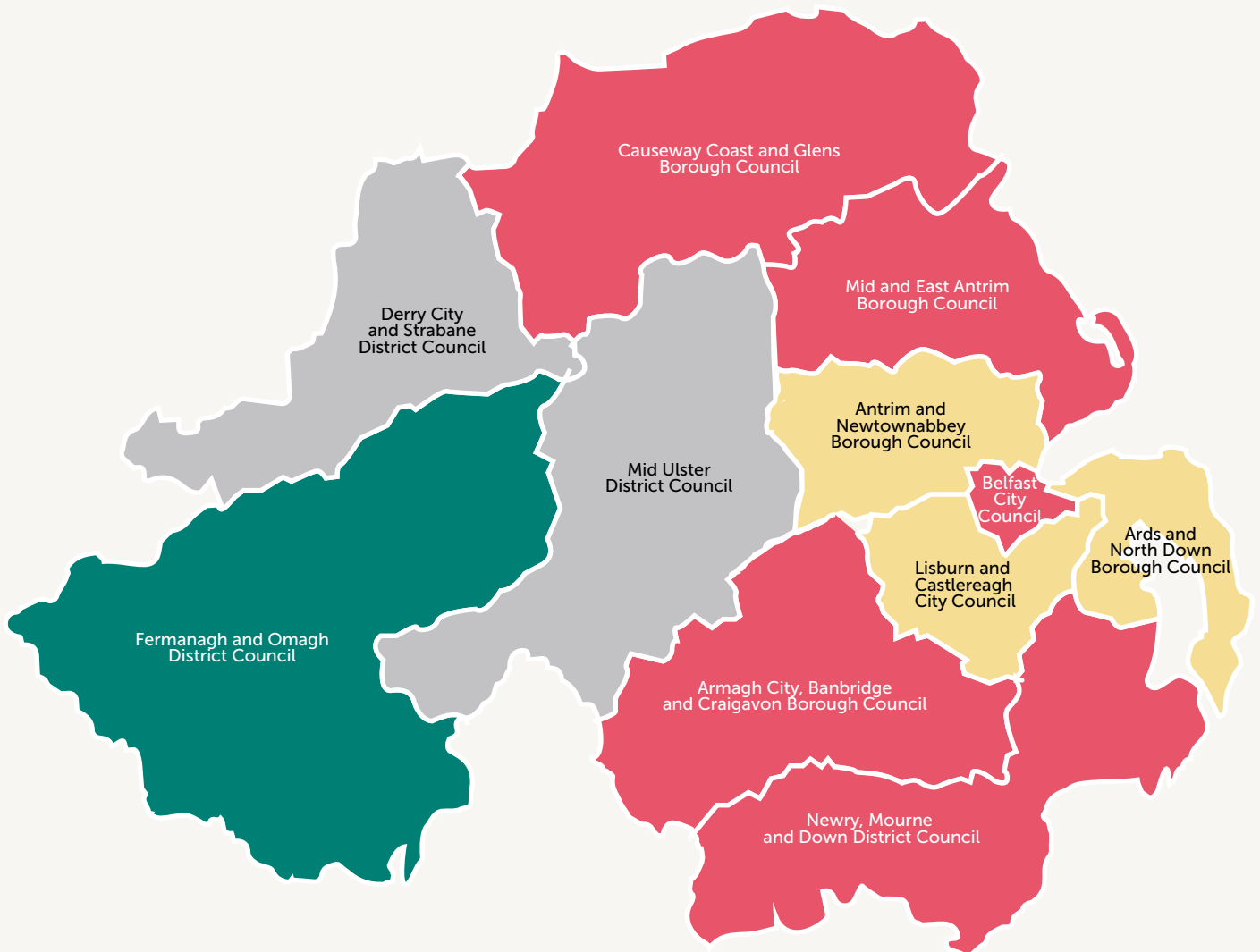
THE UK AT A GLANCE

SCOTLAND



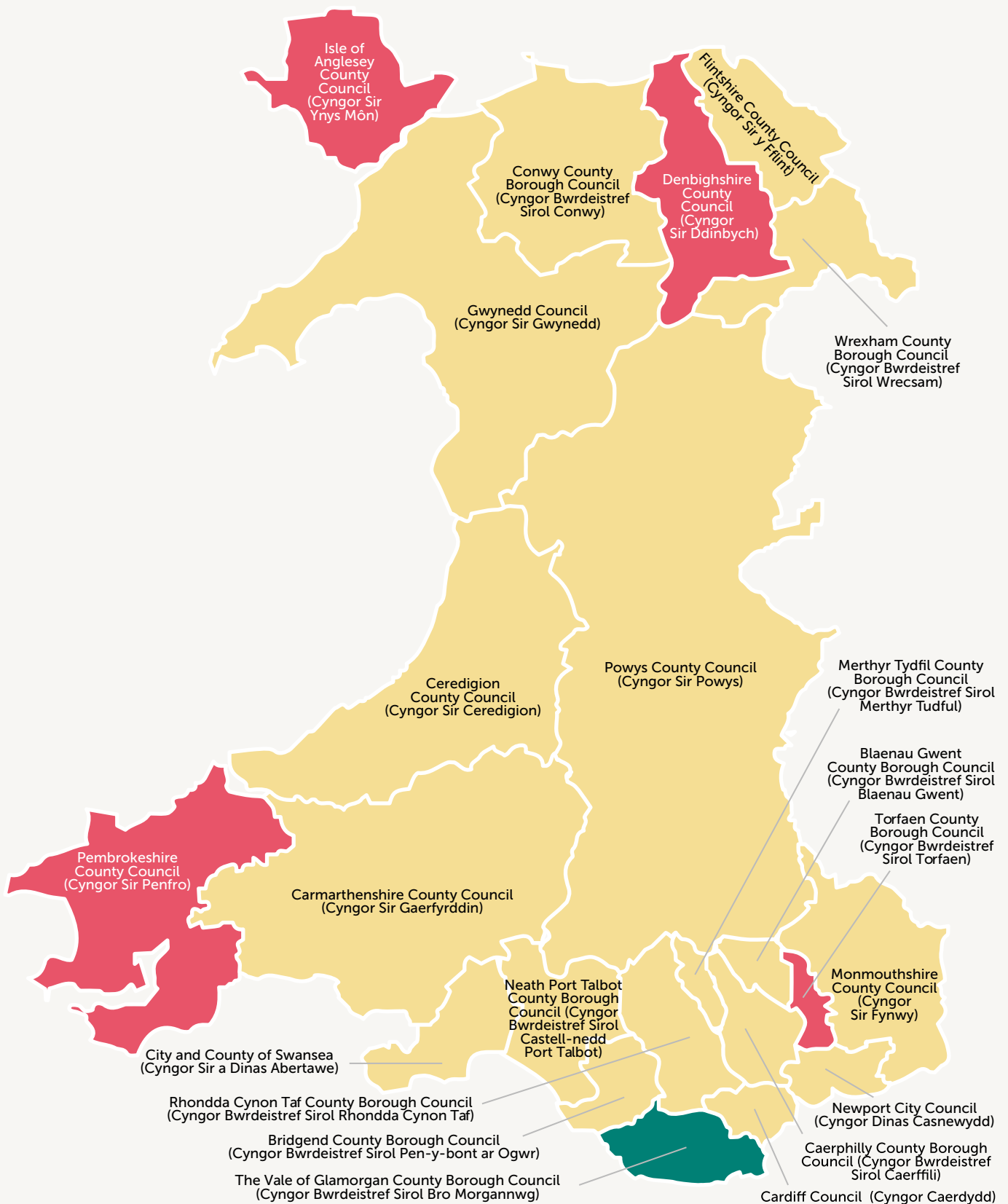
THE UK AT A GLANCE

NORTHERN IRELAND



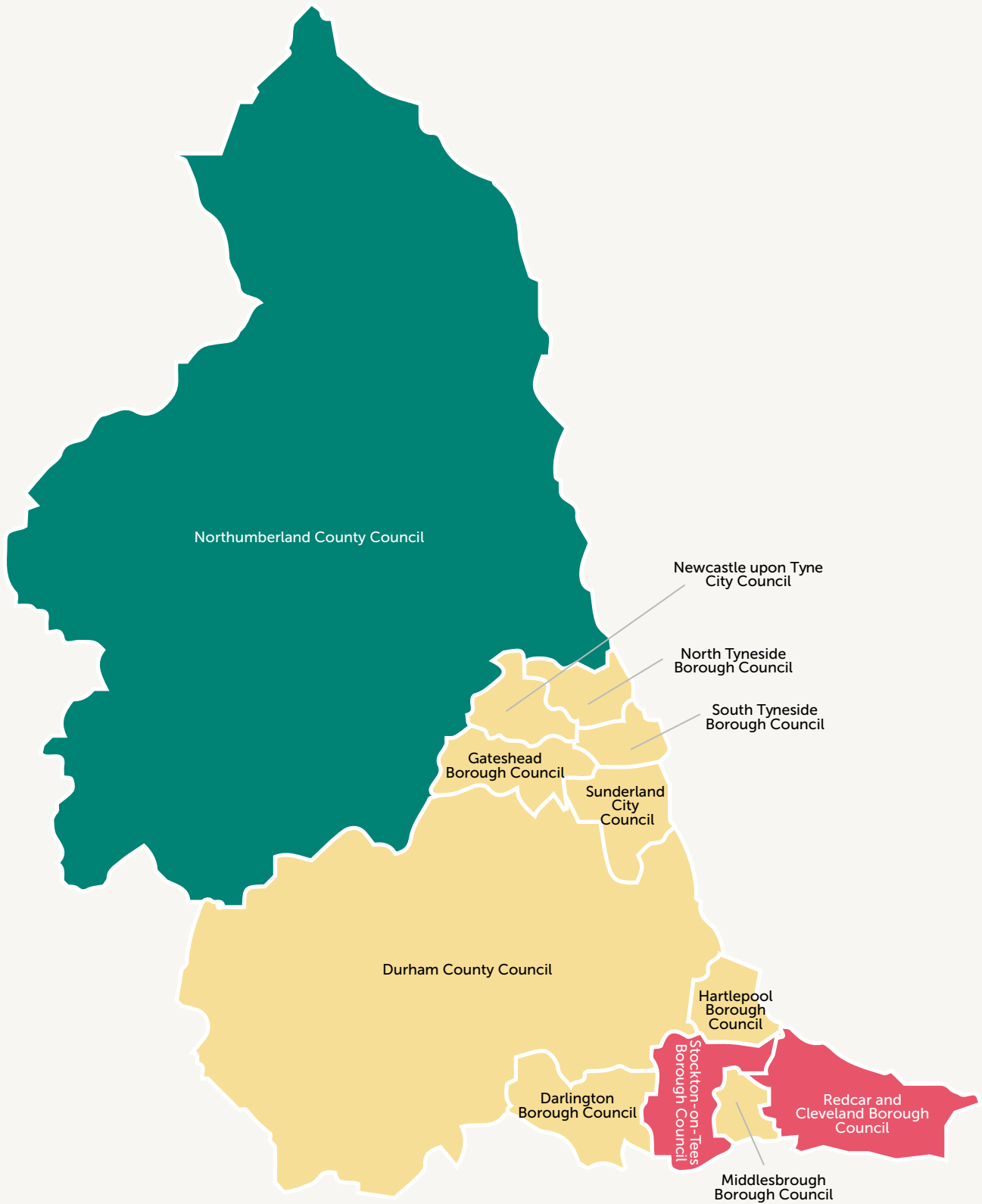
THE UK AT A GLANCE

WALES



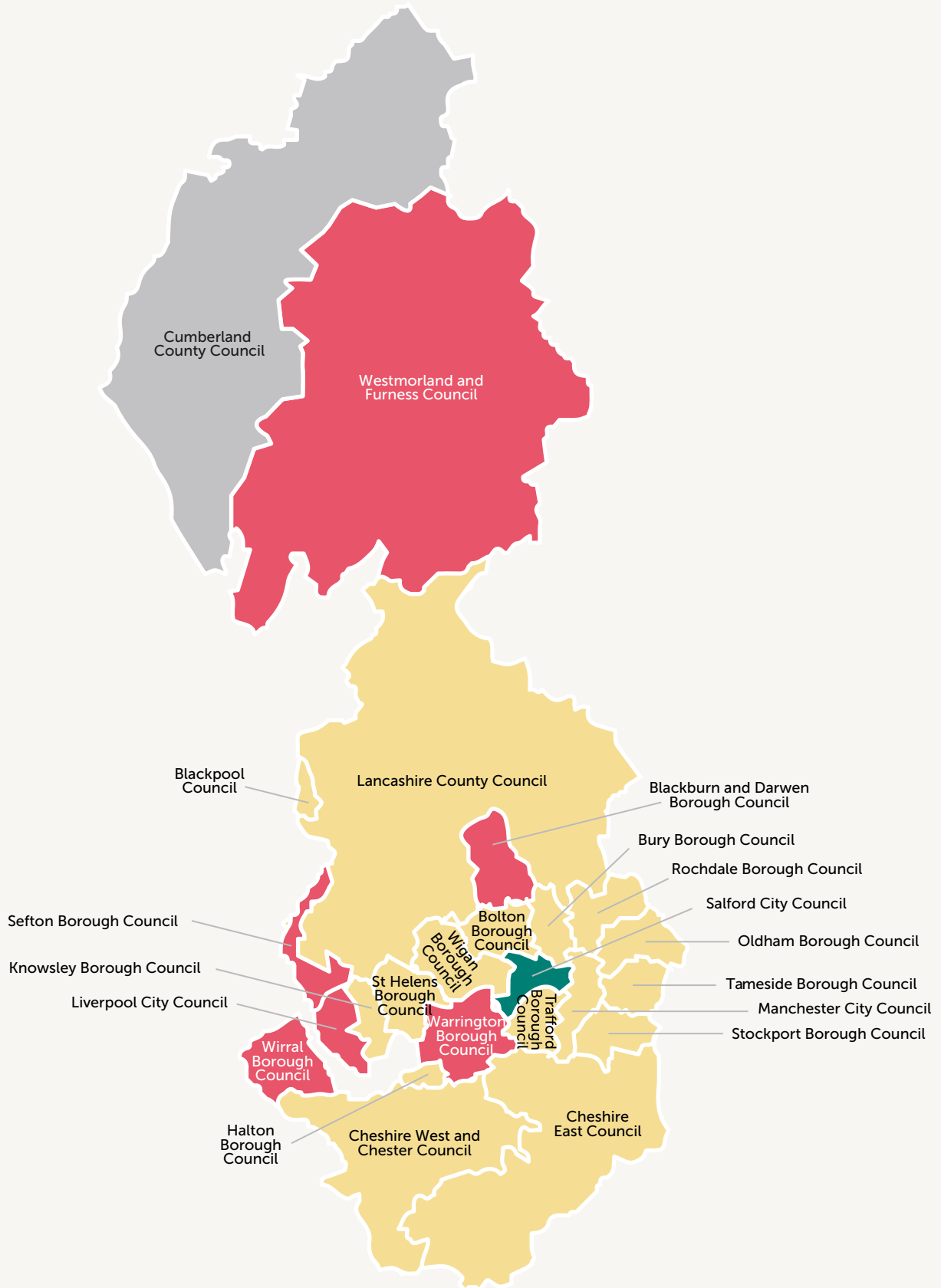
THE UK AT A GLANCE

NORTH EAST, ENGLAND



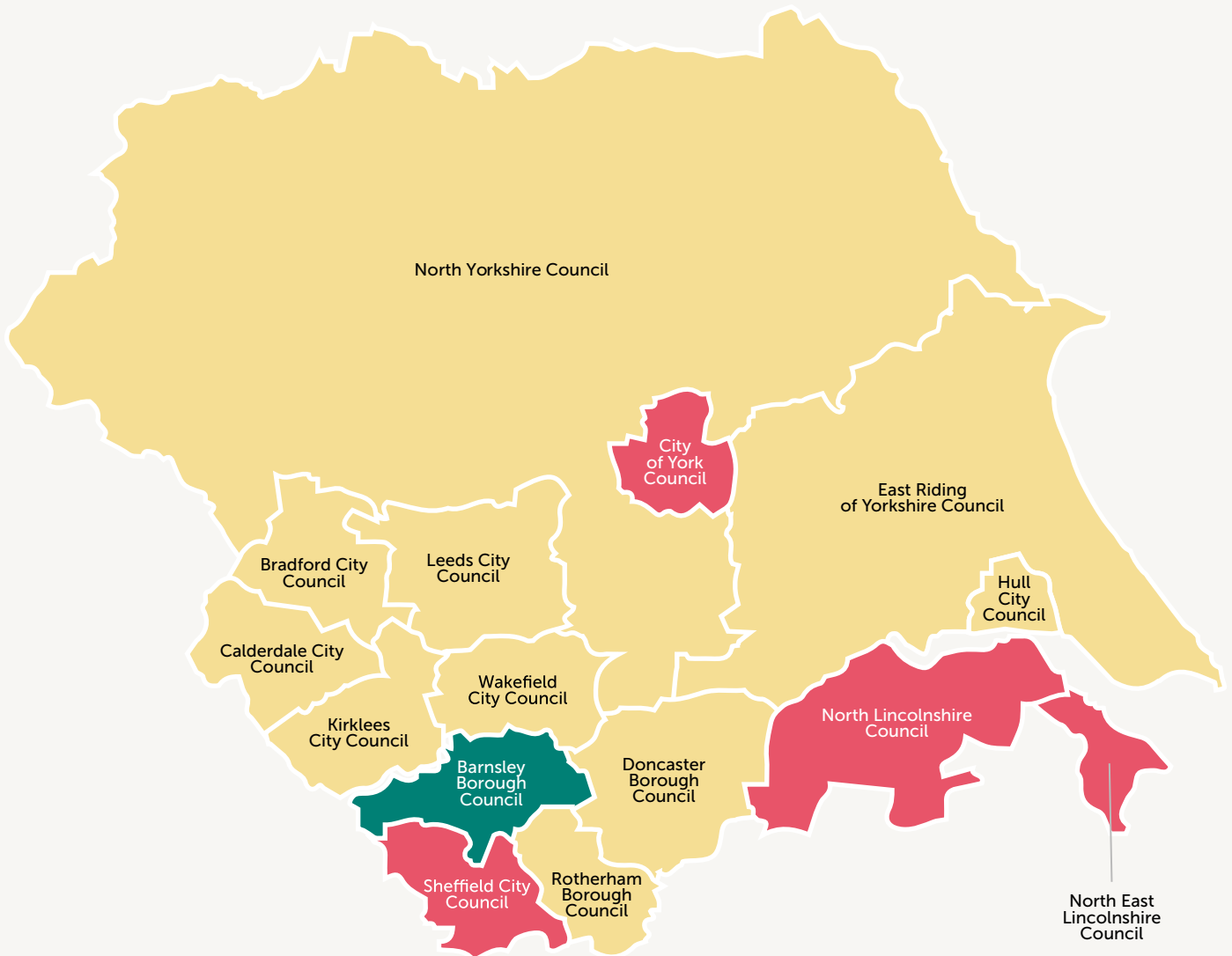
THE UK AT A GLANCE

NORTH WEST, ENGLAND



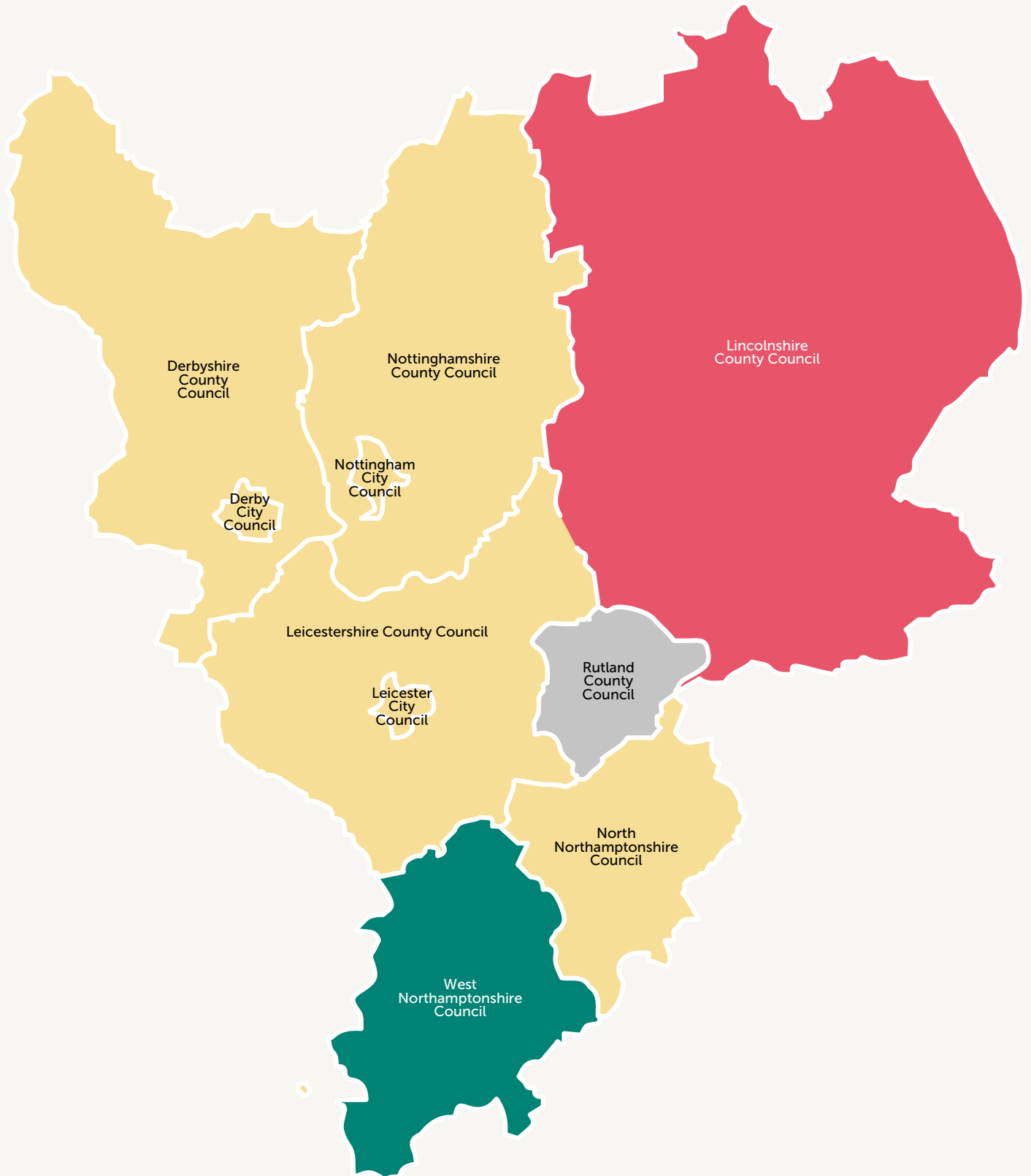
THE UK AT A GLANCE

YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER, ENGLAND



THE UK AT A GLANCE

EAST MIDLANDS, ENGLAND



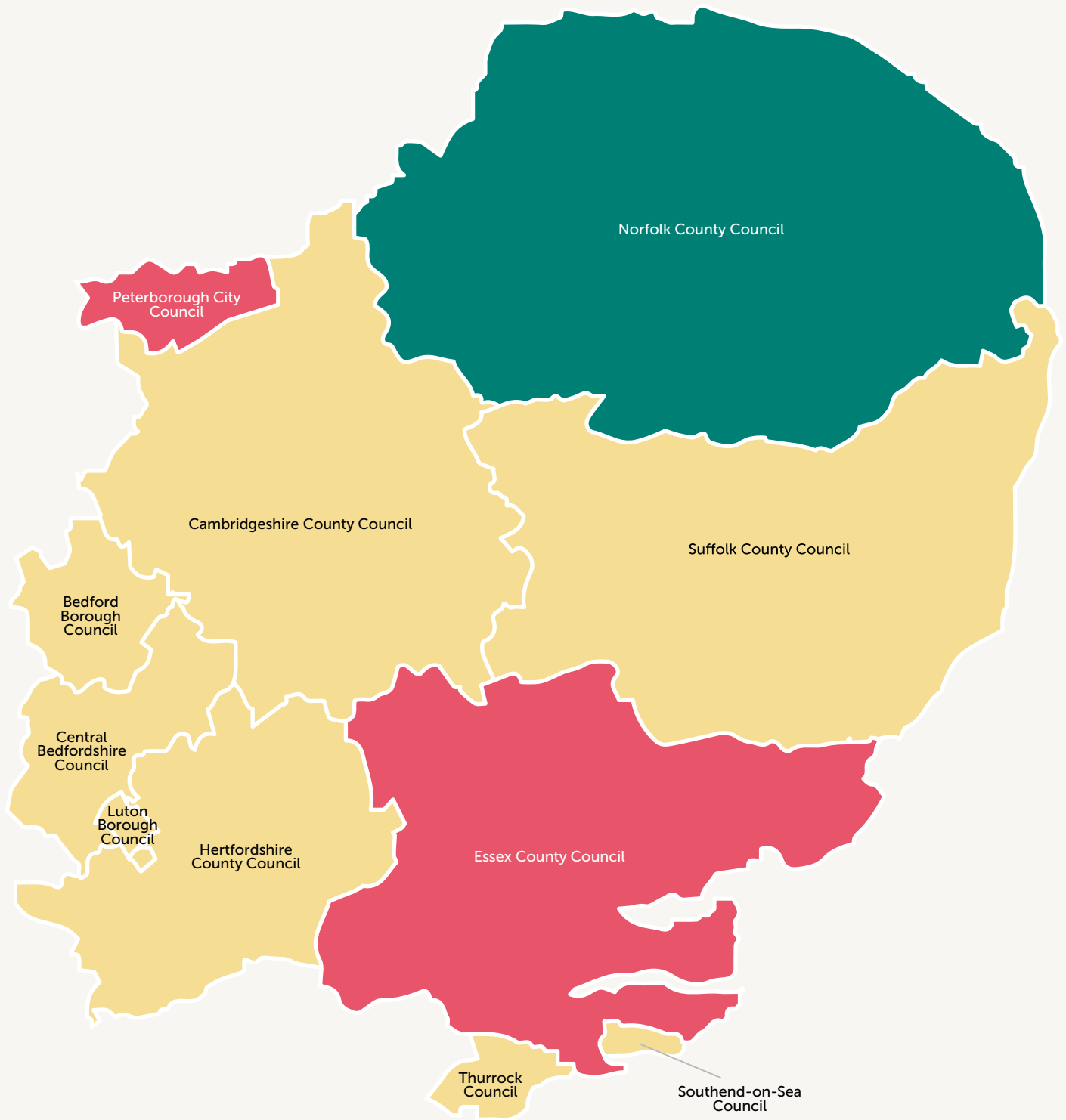
THE UK AT A GLANCE

WEST MIDLANDS, ENGLAND



THE UK AT A GLANCE

EAST OF ENGLAND



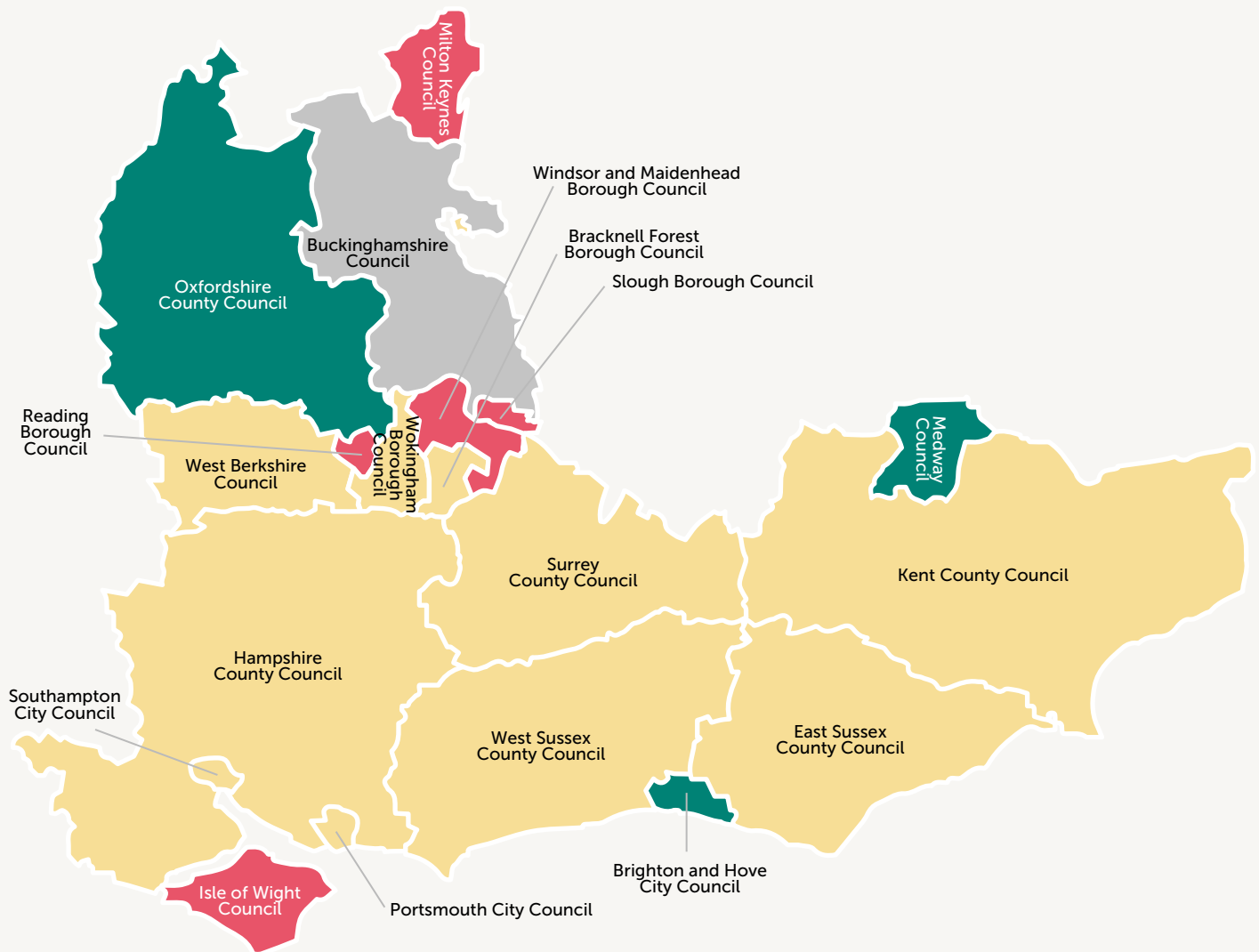
THE UK AT A GLANCE

LONDON, ENGLAND



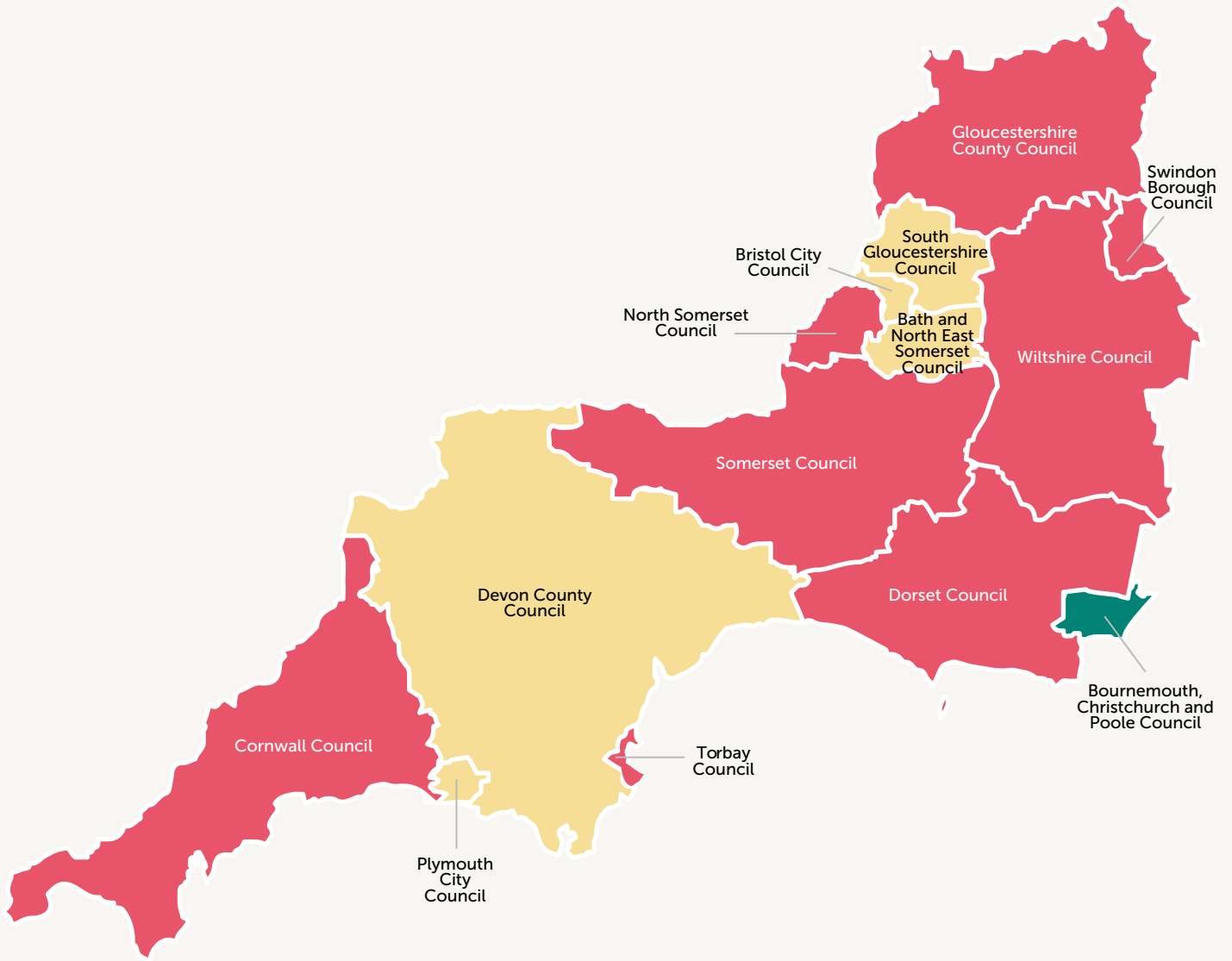
THE UK AT A GLANCE

SOUTH EAST, ENGLAND



THE UK AT A GLANCE

SOUTH WEST, ENGLAND



OUR KEY FINDINGS

To understand what the current provision is for vegans across local authorities nationally, FOI requests were sent to each of the UK's 380 local authorities, including both the 216 higher tier local authorities and 164 district councils. Our findings focus on the 209 higher tier authorities for whom sufficient data was available. The FOI consisted of four main questions designed to reveal whether the council had taken steps to be inclusive of veganism and to address meat and dairy consumption with regard to their environmental goals.

The councils were categorised using a traffic light system. The full details of how the councils were categorised is detailed in the Methodology section later in this report. Our key findings are discussed in the following sections.

Most councils are taking some steps to be inclusive of veganism, but are not capitalising on the opportunity to promote vegan food as a more sustainable option

While most councils acknowledge veganism as a protected characteristic in decision-making regarding the provision of food, in practice many councils take only minimal action with regard to providing vegan options at events or in local authority canteens. This may translate to only

a small selection of vegan options or options only available on request. A common response to our FOI request was that vegan meal options are provided and that steps are taken to be inclusive of veganism only if a specific request is made. Although these measures may show compliance with the legal duty not to discriminate against vegans, an opportunity exists for all local authorities across the UK to be more proactive with their vegan catering options to help combat climate change.


Many councils do not host events or have canteens, but they do require that vegan hot and cold meal options are included within their catering procurement contracts. Most councils are inclusive of veganism with regard to schools, but may also require that veganism is considered at other sites, such as nursing homes, libraries, leisure centres and cafes.

A small, but not insignificant, number of councils are taking demonstrable steps to be inclusive of veganism and going further to promote vegan food as the environmentally friendly and more sustainable option

The councils that we have categorised as Green are good examples of vegan-inclusive

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Several councils are going above and beyond their legal requirements when it comes to food catering provision – for example, Barnsley Borough Council stated that over 50% of meal options are vegan under their school catering provision.

organisations that have also recognised the wider benefits of providing vegan food and taken further steps to combat climate change. We believe other local authorities should look to these councils for inspiration. Oxfordshire County Council and Edinburgh City Council have signed the Plant Based Treaty. Other councils have not signed the treaty, but have detailed climate action plans that include commitments to reducing meat and dairy consumption.

Several councils are going above and beyond their legal requirements when it comes to food catering provision – for example, Barnsley Borough Council stated that over 50% of meal options are vegan under their school catering provision.

Many of these councils have several vegan options in their local authority canteens or provide a wide spread of vegan options at catered events – for example, catered internal events held at Oxfordshire County Council are now 100% vegan. At Newham Council office restaurant, 33% of all hot meal options are vegan.

Climate action plans are mixed

Some councils have detailed plans to cut their meat and dairy consumption as part of broader climate action plans. Other councils have climate action plans, but do not explicitly acknowledge the need for a reduction in meat and dairy consumption. A significant number of councils said they have no plan to reduce meat and dairy consumption to meet environmental goals.

A significant number of district councils were

unable to answer our questions due to the limited nature of their responsibilities or budgets. We therefore do not include these councils in our overall map of the UK. However, it is worth acknowledging that, despite this, some district councils are doing great work to be inclusive of veganism and/or have climate action plans that acknowledge the need for a reduction in meat and dairy products.

A concerning number of councils are not taking steps to be inclusive of veganism

Just over a quarter of councils failed to recognise their legal responsibility to cater to vegans, when it comes to decision-making regarding the provision of food. Of the UK's higher tier local authorities 56 did not acknowledge veganism as a protected characteristic. The vast majority of councils responded more positively to this question, with 153 local authorities saying they do treat veganism as a protected characteristic. However, it is concerning that a significant number still do not fully recognise their legal obligation to take the needs of vegans into account.

The majority of local authorities in Northern Ireland did not acknowledge their legal duty to be inclusive of vegans

Nine of Northern Ireland's 11 local authorities did not acknowledge that they have a legal duty to be inclusive of vegans. For example, Antrim

and Newtownabbey Borough Council told us: “Veganism is not a protected characteristic under this legislation.” They argued this on the basis that the Equality Act does not apply to Northern Ireland.

However, we consider that this interpretation of the law and legal duty is incorrect. Both the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act are applicable in Northern Ireland and vegans are protected under human rights law. The Equality Act is not applicable in Northern Ireland because Northern Ireland has devolved power to create its own equality legislation. However, equality law in Northern

Ireland prohibits discrimination against individuals with philosophical beliefs and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland explicitly names veganism as a protected philosophical belief under equality legislation in Northern Ireland.¹⁵

The fact so many local authorities in Northern Ireland did not acknowledge their legal duty to be inclusive of veganism is concerning. It is our view that local authorities in Northern Ireland should update their understanding of equalities legislation as it relates to veganism to ensure they are adequately supporting the communities they serve.

FIVE PLACES LEADING THE WAY AND FIVE FALLING BEHIND

Top five



- 1 **Oxfordshire County Council:** Full Council event menus are 100% vegan and the catering service has increased the number of vegan choices while looking to reduce meat content even further.
- 2 **City of Edinburgh Council:** First capital city in Europe to endorse the Plant-based Treaty.
- 3 **Richmond upon Thames Council:** General catering menus at events offer a menu that is 50% vegan.
- 4 **Wandsworth Council:** The environmental impact of dietary choice is addressed in council environmental initiatives with reducing meat and dairy consumption explicitly mentioned.
- 5 **The Vale of Glamorgan County Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Bro Morgannwg):** A third of local authority canteen menu options choices are vegan.

Bottom five



- 1 **Orkney Islands Council:** claimed they “do not have any vegan diets to cater for currently as Orkney is vastly farming community”.
- 2 **Barnet Council:** veganism not considered a protected characteristic, veganism not considered in catering contracts that they issue, no climate plans.
- 3 **North Somerset Council:** no explicit requirement to provide vegan options in catering contracts, no plans to reduce meat consumption in schools.
- 4 **Slough Council:** no explicit requirement to provide vegan options in catering contracts, no plans to reduce meat consumption in schools.
- 5 **Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council:** no explicit requirement to provide vegan options in catering contracts, no plans to reduce meat consumption in schools.

¹⁵ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Religious or similar philosophical belief or opinion, <https://www.equalityni.org/Individuals/I-have-a-work-related-problem/Religious-belief-Political-opinion> (accessed 18/08/2023). See also: *Fair Employment and Treatment Order (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003*, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2003/520/contents/made>; Find out your rights, <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/find-out-your-rights>; *Religious or similar philosophical belief and political opinion explained*,

WHO IS DOING THIS WELL?

In light of the environmental pressures posed by non-vegan diets, initiatives such as the Plant Based Treaty have gathered momentum to encourage individuals, businesses and city councils to acknowledge the environmental damage caused by animal agriculture and to promote a sustainable plant-based food system. Edinburgh City Council made headlines when it became the first UK city to sign the treaty. We hope that more councils across the UK will follow their example.

One example of a UK local authority leading the way is Oxfordshire County Council, which we graded Green for their inclusion of vegans and the action it has taken to provide plant-based food at events. Councillor Ian Middleton, County Councillor for Kidlington South Division and Leader of the County Green Group, told us:



“ As a county some of our most important priorities are combating climate change, reducing food waste, and supporting public health. A transition to plant-

based food system supports all three of those priorities and I'm glad to see Oxfordshire County Council being recognised for being on the right side of history in taking action in this area. The Council is responsible for catering in 57 primary schools, all of which now include at least one vegan meal out of the three served daily. At the same time, over the last year we made the decision to provide exclusively plant-based food at council meetings. This inspired a lively debate both inside and outside the council chamber which was definitely worth having, but once the new meals were provided, they were enthusiastically received. I've even been told by some colleagues that it is amongst the best food ever served by the council.

Now that we've taken these steps, I hope other councils and councillors will be inspired to follow our example and learn from what we've achieved. It's time for councils across the country to step up and show leadership in addressing the diet-climate connection.

METHODOLOGY

This research began by conducting preliminary desk-based research into the councils in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This involved searching through the websites of these councils and recording any public information on vegan catering or on efforts to reduce the council's meat and dairy consumption at catered events, in council building canteens or in any other buildings operated by the council.

Keyword searches were carried out using the search tool on the websites of these councils. The minutes of the council cabinets and relevant

committees on topics relating to catering or environmental goals were accessed. Any relevant reports on catering or environmental goals, such as climate crisis plans, were also accessed and any useful information recorded. Some councils also have blogs or active social media accounts and these were also scanned for relevant information.

This stage of the research revealed that the majority of councils do not have publicly available information on their catering provision at council events, meetings, canteens or buildings owned



Our research revealed that most councils do not publicly state whether the council's decision-making regarding food provision takes into consideration that veganism is a protected characteristic for the purpose of the Equality Act 2010.

or operated by the council. Furthermore, this research revealed that most councils do not publicly state whether the council's decision-making regarding food provision takes into consideration that veganism is a protected characteristic for the purpose of the Equality Act 2010.

This stage of the research was designed to understand the current level of publicly available information and help inform the next stage of the research, which was to send FOI requests to the councils. All 380 local authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were sent the following questions in a FOI request:

1 With regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, does your decision-making regarding the provision of food take into account the fact that veganism is a protected characteristic for the purpose of the Equality Act 2010? *Yes/No*

2 How many vegan hot and cold meal options do you offer:

- In your own local authority canteen every day (if you have one)? **0, 1, 2, 3 or more.** *Please also express this as a proportion of the overall number of options offered.*
- In external events catering (if applicable)? **Eg: 0, 1, 2, 3 or more.** *Please also express this as a proportion of the overall number of options offered.*

3 Is a requirement for providing vegan hot and cold meal options included within the catering procurement contracts you issue for other catering provision for which you are responsible including schools, leisure centres, care homes, libraries, and any other public buildings? *Yes/No*

4 Has your organisation taken any action to reduce meat and dairy consumption in order to meet environmental goals?

- *If yes, please detail what actions have been taken, e.g. 100% or 50% plant-based food options offered.*
- *If no, do you have ambitions to take action in this area, eg through setting meat reduction targets? Yes/no, if yes please detail what ambitions you have set out.*

The councils in England, Wales and Scotland were first contacted between 3 and 5 April 2023. Councils in Northern Ireland were contacted on 11 May 2023. The councils had a legal obligation to respond to our FOI within 20 working days; however, some councils did not meet this requirement. The councils that did not respond within 20 working days were sent reminders. A traffic light colour-coded system was designed to categorise the responses from the councils as follows.

Green: The council answered our questions to a satisfactory degree and/or the council has taken demonstrable steps to be inclusive of veganism and to address their meat and dairy consumption.

Demonstrable steps might include more than 30% of menus under the local authority's control consisting of vegan options, or entirely plant-based catering for external events. Other examples could be signing the Plant Based Treaty, introducing Meat Free days in schools or other actions, such as targets to reduce meat and dairy consumption.

Amber: The council did not provide satisfactory answers to all of our questions and/or the council has taken only limited steps to be inclusive of veganism and to address their meat and dairy consumption.

Limited steps may include less than 30% of menus under the local authority's control consisting of vegan options or that limited vegan options may be provided only on request.

An example of an Amber council might be one that has confirmed that they consider veganism to be a protected characteristic, but only provides a small selection of vegan options and only if explicitly requested. While we acknowledge that these councils may be meeting their legal duty to avoid discriminating against vegans in the provision of food, we nevertheless feel that they are failing to recognise the additional value of a plant-based diet.

Red: The council did not answer our questions and/or have not taken steps to be inclusive of veganism or to address their meat and dairy consumption.

Grey: The council was unable to answer our questions and/or do not have the information requested.

Councils were categorised after careful consideration of their full response to our FOI request. It is important to acknowledge that the categorisation process is subjective as a result of the inconsistent nature of the FOI responses. A certain degree of fair judgement was needed to categorise all the councils into one of four possible categories. It was fairly typical for a council to not answer a particular question or to simply not hold the information required to answer. It was also common for a council to provide irrelevant or poor responses to some questions in the FOI, but to provide useful and positive information for others. For instance, a council may have little information on their inclusion of veganism in their catering procurement contracts, but may have comprehensive plans to reduce meat and dairy consumption. It is likely that such a council, on balance, would be categorised as Amber.

Similarly, if a council provides minimal vegan options, but does not recognise veganism as a protected characteristic and has no plan for the reduction of meat and dairy, then it may be categorised as Red. This is because this research aimed to come to a holistic assessment of each council, including, but not limited to, whether or not it meets its legal duties.

Steps have been taken to ensure that the councils were not unfairly judged or categorised due to a poor FOI response. Where necessary, the councils were asked for further information or clarification so that they could be appropriately categorised.

The categorisation process used for this report relied on human judgement and we therefore recognise the methodological limitations of such an approach, especially as the report aims to assess a variety of factors, including whether or not each council acknowledges and meets its legal duties, as well as if it is taking steps above and beyond its legal duty. Nevertheless, considerable efforts have been taken to categorise the councils as consistently and fairly as possible. We therefore believe that the results

of our research process accurately reflect how effectively local authorities across the UK are catering for vegans.

The UK's 164 district councils, alongside 7 higher tier local authorities, could not be categorised as Green, Amber, or Red – these councils were categorised as N/A. All district councils were categorised as N/A for the following reasons. The overwhelming majority of district councils were unable to

answer our questions because many either do not have responsibility for catering or procurement contracts or fall under a two-tier local authority system, with the larger council holding responsibility in this area. To ensure methodological fairness, it was decided that these 164 district councils, as well as the 7 higher tier authorities for which insufficient data was available, would not be graded.

WHAT ACTION CAN YOU TAKE?



Individuals

If you are interested in seeing how your local council responded to our request, you can search for it on our website [here](#).

If your local council has been graded Amber or Red, we encourage you to get in contact with your councillors and encourage them to take further action to be inclusive of veganism and to provide better vegan options in their catering. Similarly, if your council has been graded Green, please consider writing to encourage them to continue offering vegan options.

We have template emails on our [website](#) for you to use when contacting councils or other local institutions.

You can also write to your local MP encouraging them to back our Catering for Everyone campaign. You can find and contact your MP [here](#).

If you have your own experience of using public sector catering that you would like to share with us, you can do so on our [website](#).



Policy-makers

We are calling upon the UK government and the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to make

changes to the law to guarantee at least one nutritious vegan option on every public sector menu, every day.

We are calling on MPs, MSPs, MSs, and MLAs to back the campaign, joining the numbers of those [who have already endorsed](#) the Catering for Everyone campaign.



Those working within or for councils

We encourage those working in or for councils to discover how their own council has been rated and to act on this information. Local authorities have a key leadership role in communities across the UK and should develop ambitious climate plans that include clear goals to reduce meat and dairy consumption in the areas for which they are responsible. Providing nutritious and tasty vegan options every day or increasing the number of vegan options is one way that councils can take a lead in this area.

Signing the [Plant Based Treaty](#) is a clear indication that a council is taking the links between animal agriculture and the climate crisis seriously. We encourage more councils to follow the example of Edinburgh City Council and Oxfordshire County Council by signing the treaty.



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