



West Midlands Combined Authority

Environment & Energy Board

Wednesday 28 September 2022 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Ian Courts (Chair)
Councillor Rob Clinton
Councillor Steve Evans
Councillor Peter Hughes
Councillor Andy Mackiewicz
Councillor Majid Mahmood
Matthew Rhodes

Portfolio Lead for Environment, Energy & HS2
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
City of Wolverhampton Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
Energy Capital

In attendance via MS Teams

Councillor Kerry Murphy
Suzanne Ward

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Environment Agency

Item Title No.

- 1. Welcome and Introduction to the Birmingham and Black Country EcoPark**
The Chair welcomed board members to the meeting for the start of the 2022/23 municipal year and invited introductions of the Environment & Energy Board members.
- 2. Apologies for Absence**
An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jim O'Boyle (Coventry).
- 3. Minutes - 9 March 2022**
The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record.
- 4. Matters Arising**
The Chair agreed for a response from a member of the Environment team to a public question regarding when the next West Midlands Greener Together Forum would be scheduled.

The Environment Behaviour Change Project Officer noted electronic invitations were due to be sent imminently and the date of the next forum would be held on 21 November 2022 in Coventry.

5. Community Green Grant Update

The board considered a report from the Community Green Grants Project Officer to provide a progress update on delivery of the WMCA Community Green Grant, covering projects funded, grant take up and wider community engagement.

The aims of the Community Green Grant were to;

- i. Increase or improve green spaces close to where people live,
- ii. Connect people to nature, especially communities experiencing green deprivation,
- iii. Enhance the local environment,
- iv. Tackle barriers to accessing green spaces.

Resolved:

- (1) The funding available to not-for-profit groups in the combined authority area through the small and large grants be noted.
- (2) The support available through the environment team to small charities and grass roots groups to look at how they can increase biodiversity through a community green grant be noted.
- (3) Board members in their role as local leaders, considered how to promote the community green grant especially in areas of low take up.

6. Net Zero Neighbourhood

The board considered a report from the SMART Hub Lead officer to provide an overview of the decision to award £1.65m grant funding to Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council to deliver the first Net Zero Neighbourhood (NZN) demonstrator in Brockmoor, and to set out the proposed approach to working with other constituent member authorities to continue to develop their NZN plans.

In March 2021 the WMCA Board approved £5.1 million funding from the Investment Programme to fund the development of the priority initiatives to deliver on the WM2041 Five Year Plan. The Net Zero Neighbourhood Demonstrator programme was awarded £2.1million as part of this decision.

The aims of the Net Zero Neighbourhood Demonstrator were;

- i. To take a place-based approach to retrofit and wider improvements to neighbourhoods such as new green spaces and transport links,
- ii. To create a replicable finance model based on wider benefits (health and wellbeing, employment opportunities and inclusive growth) to enable scaling-up of retrofit.

While the funding made available through the Investment Programme was intended to fund the first demonstrator project, a key aim of the demonstrator phase was to develop a pipeline of Net Zero Neighbourhood projects to help attract further funding and investment into the programme in the future, with each of the seven constituent member local authorities invited to first complete a Net Zero Neighbourhood Expression of Interest (EoI) form and then complete a full Net Zero Neighbourhood plan by early July 2022. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's plan for Brockmoor was the plan that best aligned with the goals of the programme, providing high confidence of successful delivery and had been selected to receive the remaining £1.65m Investment Programme funding.

Resolved:

- (1) The decision to award £1.65m grant funding to Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council to deliver the first net zero neighbourhood demonstrator in Brockmoor was endorsed.
- (2) The intention to create a net zero neighbourhood working group to support other constituent members to further develop their net zero neighbourhood plans and identify areas of particular interest where there could be potential for specific collaboration with other work and stakeholders was endorsed.
- (3) Board members provided feedback on how to be engaged or informed on specific areas of the programme, outside of any board meetings.

7. Presentation: Industrial Energy Taskforce - update on progress

The board received a presentation from the Chair of the West Midlands Industrial Energy Taskforce to provide an update of the taskforce that was established on 3 August to focus entirely on the impact from the recent rise in energy costs on energy-exposed businesses in the region which was business-led with the taskforce producing an interim report due in November and final report in June 2023 on support from government.

The purpose of the West Midlands Industrial Energy Taskforce was;

- i. To identify and support short-term interventions to deliver more effective support to energy-exposed businesses to reduce their energy demand and exposure to wholesale prices.
- ii. To identify and promote medium-term interventions to adjust regulations and levies and to reduce network costs and other burdens which fall disproportionality on West Midlands businesses.
- iii. To lobby government to recognise the unique situation facing the West Midlands and to enhance its commitments to addressing the challenges facing energy-exposed businesses in the region.

The presentation noted the immediate 5-point plan following the first meeting of the taskforce in September of government to support for the demographic of the West Midlands region as the energy crisis was having a disproportionate impact on the region and businesses, with the most exposed businesses to increased energy costs being small to medium manufacturing businesses exporting or competing in global markets.

Resolved:

(1) That the presentation be noted.

8. Presentation: Trailblazer Devolution Deal Net Zero and Environment

The board received a presentation from the Corporate Strategy Lead to provide an update, overview of principles and summary of policy areas of the Trailblazer Devolution Deal.

Officers from the Environment team highlighted from the presentation the net zero and environment asks to government through the Trailblazer Devolution Deal for energy and energy efficiency, as well as adaptation and natural environment.

Resolved:

(1) That the presentation be noted.

9. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 7 December 2022.

The meeting ended at 11:55am.