



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Environment & Energy Board

Wednesday 12 July 2023 at 11.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor John Cotton (Chair)

Birmingham City Council

Present via MS Teams

Councillor Rob Clinton

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Craig Collingswood

City of Wolverhampton Council

Councillor Majid Mahmood

Birmingham City Council

Item No.

1. Minutes - 1 March 2023

The minutes were agreed as a correct record.

2. Community Engagement Update: Greener Together Citizens' Panel and Greener Together Forum

Jackie Homan presented on the Greener Together Forum and Citizens' Panel. She provided context for the Citizens' Forum, sharing the aims and the operations of the forum and how it functioned within the community. Topics discussed included tree planting, retrofitting and fuel poverty. Councillor Majid Mahmood asked if more work could be done to increase representation of the region in the forum and asked how diversity was reflected in the forum. Jackie Homan confirmed that work was being done to increase engagement. She then said that from an equality and diversity perspective, the forum was hoped to be reflective of those living in the region and diversity was sought to be increased through its engagement, as the forum was held in a different area of the region each time it met.

Jackie Homan then went on to share the aims of the Greener Together Citizens' Panel before sharing the panel's selection criteria and its logistics. She then reported on the outcome of the air quality sessions that the panel held that were due to be considered when implementing the air quality framework actions. Jackie Homan then introduced Deepu and Alison who shared their experiences of being on the panel and their reasoning for joining. They both focused on their desire to protect future generations. Alison expanded to say that she also desired to have a voice, the experience and a general curiosity in making a difference.

In response to a question from Jackie Homan, Deepu and Alison both confirmed that was important to the panel that the panel's voice was heard. Deepu shared some achievements of the panel. He highlighted the input that the panel had on the air quality framework. Finally, Alison shared the common themes included the reduction of social inequality and that implementation should be fair, transparent, and driven by data.

In response to a question from Councillor Robert Clinton, Alison stated that face-to-face sessions were imperative to the team working together and that the panel had excellent facilitators that ensure every voice was heard in the process. Councillor Majid Mahmood commended the WMCA on the work that had been completed to date and shared that Birmingham City Council would be hoping to implement some of the outputs of the panel's discussions.

Resolved:

(1) The work of the Greener Together Citizens' Panel be noted and their recommendations and concerns that informed the WMCA's energy and environment programme be noted.

3. Air Quality Framework

Jackie Homan and Alex Jones presented the Air Quality Framework. Jackie Homan shared the history and aims of the framework. She made references to the air quality actions plans led by constituent local authorities. Alex Jones then highlighted air quality in the West Midlands and the negative impact poor air quality had on the population of the region. He then shared feedback and consultation already completed and shared key themes such as an out-of-date approaches and gaps in monitoring of air quality and lack of clean air zones in specific areas. He shared the framework methodology and talked through the timeline to launch, including the RAG rating of the options appraisal and the consultation timelines for which approval was being sought.

Jackie Homan then shared next steps, from July to October. She stated that the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs would be providing an air quality grant to implement quick wins and mitigate resourcing issues. She shared that a framework delivery group would be mobilised to improve governance and incorporate a 5-year review programme. Jackie Homan then closed by highlighting successes, funding wins and activity to date as detailed in the report before she shared some questions with the board for them to feedback to the air quality team.

The Chair commended the team on the level of information provided on the work being done but noted that additional resource was required. He asked how the WMCA would plug the funding gap, and Jackie Homan acknowledged this and stated that while some funding was in place, some aspects of funding would require business cases or lobbying from DEFRA.

In response to Councillor Majid Mahmood, Jackie Homan confirmed that more work was required to understand the true picture of indoor air quality and gave examples of log burners and gas hobs, and work was being conducted to identify synergies with current programmes such as retrofitting. She also confirmed that a platform was being sourced in order to hold the air quality data produced by the region. Alex Jones seconded the importance of this.

Councillor Rob Clinton noted the increase of wood companies providing wood as a result of the energy crisis and highlighted it would have a negative impact on the environment. He then asked what work could be done in order to reinforce road surfaces and what research was being conducted on solutions to support suggestions for change, for example, road signs. Jackie Homan responded to say that work was being done to identify what actions could be taken to support behaviour change and this was supported by funding from DEFRA.

Resolved:

(1) The draft Air Quality Framework be endorsed for consultation with key stakeholders.

(2) It be agreed to pursue WMCA-wide air quality targets that exceeded the nationally established targets.

(3) The proposed next steps for finalising the framework be approved and the points around resourcing and governance be noted.

4. Natural Environment Update

Mike Webb provided an update on the Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC). He shared the challenges of the current biodiversity and climate crisis, before sharing the opportunities of how these challenges could be resolved. He reported on the government response, Green Finance, to improvements to the environment within society. He continued and stated that the WMCA was a part of the national LINC pilot study which involved a £1million grant over the course of two years designed to develop a pipeline of projects, including building inhouse capacity, become self-sustaining and increase integration with other key strategies.

He talked the committee through how Green Finance worked, he shared information on the region's current nature markets and highlighted where there were gaps in the market for possible future nature markets. He then highlighted that biodiversity net gain would be a requirement from September 2023.

Councillor Majid Mahmood raised the Bankers without Boundaries initiative and Mike Webb confirmed awareness of the initiative and agreed with Councillor Majid Mahmood that aggregation was important in order to gain funding. Mike Webb also confirmed, in response to the Chair, that projects would be ready to trade within around two years.

Resolved:

The report was noted.

5. West Midlands Forest Partnership

Jeff Grant delivered a presentation on the West Midlands Forrest Partnership. He provided insight on his role as Partnership Co-ordinator. He then shared that a study had been procured to identify the urban forest structure, eco-system, service, and economic value of trees in the region. He stated that the results of the commissioned study would result in being able to develop a tailored approach to mitigation. He also shared that a study was being conducted in order to develop a case for a tree nursery that will increase both the number and diversity of trees within the region.

Councillor Majid Mahmood commented that Birmingham City Council had been involved with the West Midlands Forrest Partnership initiative and highlighted that the survey was the biggest of its kind to be conducted in the UK. He continued, stating that the tree nursery should contain trees that would adapt to the changes to the climate and that would reduce the amount of sap that weeps on to cars. Jeff Grant confirmed that both these items would be taken under consideration.

Councillor Robert Clinton asked if the Black Country map could be provided and asked that the maturity of the trees planted are also considered in order to increase their chances of survival, to which Jeff Grant agreed.

Resolved:

The report be noted.

6. Environment & Energy Board Terms of Reference

Jackie Homan presented the Terms of Reference for an annual review.

Resolved:

The terms of reference be noted.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 26 September 2023 - 1.00pm

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm.