

Environment Board

Thursday 25 June 2020 at 10.30am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Ian Courts (Chair)	Portfolio Lead for Environment, Energy & HS2
Councillor Oliver Butler	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Maria Crompton	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Andy Mackiewicz	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Barbara McGarrity	City of Wolverhampton Council

In Attendance

Alex Chapman	New Economics Foundation
Ed Cox	West Midlands Combined Authority
Councillor Peter Fowler	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Cheryl Hines	Energy Capital
Jackie Homan	West Midlands Combined Authority
Nicola Jones	West Midlands Combined Authority
Jasmeet Phagoora	New Economics Foundation
Richard Rees	West Midlands Combined Authority
Callum Ringer	West Midlands Combined Authority
Claire Williams	Transport for West Midlands

8. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jim O'Boyle (Coventry) and Councillor Waseem Zaffar (Birmingham).

9. Chair's Remarks

(a) Environmental Thread Running Through COVID-19 Recovery

The Chair referenced the work of the WMCA that focussed on the economic recovery of the West Midlands from the COVID-19 pandemic, and noted that there was a strong environmental thread running through much of this work, including brownfield land remediation and work to bring a Gigafactory to the region. This pointed to a key role in the coming months for the environment portfolio and this board.

10. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

11. WM2041: A Programme for Implementing an Environmental Recovery

The board considered a report from the Director of Public Service Reform and the Head of Environment outlining the feedback that was received from the consultation on the WM2041 plan, along with the next steps that were proposed to be taken in order to progress regional work responding to the climate emergency.

The WM2041 green paper was formally launched at an event on 23 January, which began the period of consultation. This ran until 12 March and, during this time, a significant amount was done to publicise the document and promote the opportunity to provide comment and input into it. As a result of the consultation, 415 people were reached through the questionnaire hosted on the WMCA's website, 401 people through the Facebook Messenger chatbot, 16 people through the Democratic Society workshops, and 31 businesses and organisations. The responses to the consultation drew attention to several cross-cutting issues around finance, engagement, behaviour change, communications, monitoring and reporting. The report set out how these would then be taken forward.

The Chair stressed the importance of identifying how success would be measured with each of these workstreams. There was also an important role for the WMCA in working through tensions that might exist within communities or businesses that could be resistant to the societal changes needed.

Resolved:

- (1) The next steps for the delivery of WM2041, as outlined in the report and signed off by the WMCA Board on 5 June 2020, be noted.
- (2) It be noted that the WMCA Board agreed that this board should take over the decision-making and overview of progress on work on WM2041.

12. Energy Transition

The board considered a report from the Director of Public Service Reform and the Director of Energy Capital highlighting the need to ensure that the region's energy infrastructure could enable the delivery of a net zero West Midlands by 2041, as part of the WMCA's Climate Change Delivery Plan.

Work being undertaken by Energy Capital since 2018 had led it to conclude that energy infrastructure costs and investment mechanisms were a barrier to regional economic growth in the West Midlands, and particularly its ambitions for a green and equitable recovery. It was intended therefore to instigate a process with Western Power Distribution, which was recognised by OFGEM, to demonstrate how greater regional understanding and governance of energy infrastructure could enable a green and equitable recovery in the region and support the national energy system's path to net zero. In order to make any difference over the next six years, Energy Capital would need to influence the upcoming price control mechanism. This meant starting to work with, and influence, Western Power Distribution and OFGEM during the summer of 2020, when OFGEM would publish its sector specific guidance on how the key aspect anticipatory investment would be addressed.

The Chair welcomed the report on this key issue, and stressed the importance of explaining it to stakeholders outside the sector in an accessible manner that highlighted its importance in driving sustainable growth. He undertook to meet with the Director of Energy Capital in the coming weeks to consider further how this board and the WMCA could support the issues identified.

Resolved:

- (1) The role of energy infrastructure as a foundation of clean economic growth in the West Midlands and in supporting the region's recovery and decarbonisation objectives at the lowest cost to the region be recognised.
- (2) Energy Capital be endorsed to seek external funding for the projects identified in the report to address energy infrastructure issues in the region equitably.
- (3) The WMCA be encouraged to engage with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy on energy devolution and to seek its inclusion as part of the forthcoming White Paper on Devolution or any other appropriate initiatives, including the 'Distributed Level Future Energy Scenarios' process regulated by the Office of Gas & Electricity Markets, in support of the region's growth and decarbonisation plans.
- (4) Energy Capital be approved to work with the wider WMCA to secure investment into a revolving financial mechanism to support green infrastructure investment.

13. Funding Opportunities: Clean Growth Innovation Challenge and Community Green Grants

The board considered an update from the Director of Public Service Reform and the Head of Environment on proposals to make funding available to small and medium-sized enterprises to develop green initiatives or ideas to a scale that would enable them to be brought to the market. Discussions were currently being held with West Midlands 5G Ltd on the funding of these grants.

The board also received a presentation from Alex Chapman and Jasmeet Phagoora from the New Economics Foundation on a study they had undertaken on the public use of urban green space during the COVID-19 pandemic. Evidence had suggested that poorer areas had a lack of access to green spaces, and further studies were being undertaken on the proximity, accessibility and quality of green spaces and the wider health implications for communities. The New Economics Foundation was now working with local authorities in drawing up a series of recommendations. Ed Cox highlighted the potential value of this study in identifying local 'hot spots' that may benefit most from Community Green Grants.

The Chair recognised that there were significant land use planning implications arising out of this work, but looked forward to a further report being submitted to the next meeting of the board.

Resolved:

The updated be noted, and the New Economics Foundation be thanked for their informative presentation.

14. WM2041: Introduction to Circular Economy Project

The board considered a report from the Director of Public Service Reform and the Head of Environment on an overview of the upcoming work on holding workshops with key stakeholders, forming a Task Force and producing a Circular Economy Routemap for the West Midlands.

In June, the WMCA Board approved 'WM2041: A Programme for Implementing an Environmental Recovery' which included the need to establish a Circular Economy Taskforce for the West Midlands and produce a routemap to identify the possible benefits from a circular economy approach for the region, as well as the priorities to begin a local movement across different sectors and how this could be scaled up over time. Rather than depend on linear and extractive processes, the circular economy encouraged repair, reuse and regeneration. As resource productivity was maximised, waste streams were redirected, pushing the economy towards a closed-loop, zero waste system. This was further coupled with a transition to renewable energy, allowing the circular economy concept to redefine growth and build economic, natural and social capital.

The Chair stressed the importance of identifying measurable objectives and quick wins that could be achieved, recognising that there were significant behavioural issues that needed to be influenced by this workstream.

Resolved:

- (1) The next steps in the production of the West Midlands Circular Economy Routemap be agreed.
- (2) Any stakeholders critical to include in the workshops and Taskforce be identified.

15. Active Travel

The board considered an update from the Cycling & Walking Manager on the bids submitted for funding from the Emergency Active Travel Fund. This was a national £2bn Government fund, of which £17.2m would be allocated to the region. Tranche 1 of the fund would be for schemes that were able to be delivered within eight weeks of the award of funding. The WMCA submitted 51 bids on behalf of the seven constituent authorities to provide for pop-up cycle lanes, modal filters and pavement widening across a total of 23 miles of routes. The WMCA was working closely with cycling and walking partners in preparing the bids, and the results of the tranche 1 schemes were expected later in the day.

An update would be presented to the next meeting of the board on the outcomes of these bids.

Resolved:

The update be noted.

16. WM2041 - Five Year Plans

The board considered a report from the Director of Public Service Reform and the Head of Environment on an overview of the upcoming work on a Five Year Plan to begin to deliver on the WM2041 ambitions for the West Midlands.

In June, the WMCA Board approved 'WM2041: A Programme for Implementing an Environmental Recovery' which set out the urgent activity and need for the WMCA and stakeholders to produce five-year delivery plans with targets, to include interim carbon budgets and other metrics in support of delivering the zero carbon target for the West Midlands by 2041. The first Five Year Plan would:

- Provide an evidence based spatial plan, linking up potential delivery projects and investments and group them into type/location across the West Midlands region to ensure an efficient, cost-effective and prioritised approach to WM2041 delivery;
- Create a common vision for stakeholders with a strategic plan, policies and outline practical devolution opportunities;
- Outline different routes to delivery and where this would be led by communities, local authorities, the WMCA, the private sector, or a mixture;
- Outline the funding sources, financing and investment to deliver the Five Year Plan;
- Represent a step change in the way the region worked together to deliver against environmental priorities for an inclusive, prosperous and fair transition to a net zero carbon emissions society and economy.

The WMCA was working with local authorities to determine how they best wished to be engaged in the five year plans so as to ensure that the region's work was co-ordinated up to 2041. Further reports on the production of the five year plans would be submitted to future meetings of the board.

Resolved:

- (1) The next steps identified within the report be approved.
- (2) The timetable for the Five-Year Plans be approved.

17. Environment Board Terms of Reference

The board considered a report from the Head of Environment on its focus as part of its annual review of its terms of reference, and to consider amendments to the terms of reference to ensure the board was best able to fulfil its role.

The synergies between the work on environment and energy mean that this board would benefit from becoming the Environment & Energy Board, receiving updates and making decisions on the work on WM2041 as well as work undertaken by Energy Capital. Up until now, Energy Capital had only reported into the Strategic Economic Delivery Board but much of its work aligned with WM2041, eg. on retrofit, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and the regional energy transition.

The discussion on the terms of reference needed to be had in the context of the ongoing work the WMCA was doing to develop a Single Assurance Framework. This framework would provide a single set of systems, processes and protocols designed to provide an evidence-based and independent assessment of the governance, risk management and control processes of the WMCA. It was intended to submit a report on the Single Assurance Framework across all boards to the WMCA Board on 24 July.

The Chair welcomed the review of the board's terms of reference, proposing that its membership be expanded to include representatives from Energy Capital and the Environment Agency. He also wished to see biodiversity to be included within this board's specific remit.

Resolved:

- (1) The future focus of the Environment Board, including agreeing the change of name to the Environment & Energy Board, and including representatives from Energy Capital and the Environment Agency within its membership, be approved.
- (2) The workstreams of the Single Assurance Framework project that had implications for the terms of reference of this board be noted.

18. West Midlands National Park Memorandum of Understanding

The Head of Environment reported that Birmingham City University had developed the concept of a 'West Midlands National Park'. It was intended that the WMCA would formalise its involvement in this initiative through a Memorandum of Understanding, which would be the subject of a full report to a future meeting of the board.

Resolved:

The update on the West Midlands National Park initiative be noted.

The meeting ended at 12.40pm.