West Midlands Combined Authority

Environment & Energy Board

Thursday 9 September 2021 at 10.00am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Ian Courts (Chair)	Portfolio Lead for Environment, Energy & HS2
Councillor Oliver Butler	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Steve Evans	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Simon Phipps	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Suzanne Ward	Environment Agency
Councillor Waseem Zaffar	Birmingham City Council

In attendance

Councillor Peter Fowler	Overview & Scrutiny Committee

7.   Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maria Crompton (Sandwell), Councillor Andy Mackiewicz (Solihull), Councillor Jim O'Boyle (Coventry) and Matthew Rhodes (Energy Capital).

8.   Chair's Remarks

The Chair drew attention to the challenges in delivering the #WM2041 carbon neutrality plan and stressed the importance of projects that would deliver this to be capable of doing so at scale. It was necessary for projects to be clear what they were aiming to achieve, should be framed around what was possible to achieve in the timescales available, and should seek to demonstrate the value that was being added to what local authorities and other partners were already doing or seeking to do.

To support this improved clarity of purpose, he requested that all future board reports should be able to convey their purpose and objectives in a succinct way, and that meetings would only be held where there was demonstrable business to conduct.

9.   Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

10.   West Midlands Local Transport Plan Green Paper Update

The board considered a report of the Transport Strategy & Place Manager and the Principal Policy & Strategy Officer that provided an update on the development of a new West Midlands Local Transport Plan, including the publication of the transport Green Paper, proposed West Midlands Leaders summit and COP26 prospectus, and the wider programme for developing and adopting a new Local Transport Plan.

The Chair stressed the importance of providing a viable alternative to car travel across the whole region, particularly in respect of ensuring that communities were able to connect to each other. Councillor Waseem Zaffar indicated that viable communities required good public transport links to employment, leisure and community venues.

Resolved:

(1)   The progress on development of the West Midlands Local Transport Plan and the publication of the West Midlands Transport Green Paper be noted.

(2)   The planned approach for engaging with Leaders on key transport challenges through a transport 'summit' proposed to be held in September be noted.

(3)   The high-level programme timescales for developing the core Local Transport Plan strategy through to Summer 2022 be noted.

(4)   The plan to publish a West Midlands Transport Plan Prospectus to tie into wider West Midlands representation at COP26 in Glasgow in November be noted.

11.   Air Quality Options

The board received a presentation from Bill Bloss, Professor of Atmospheric Science at the University of Birmingham, on the scope for the WMCA to undertake air quality activities that supported local authorities to tackle air pollution. WM Air was the West Midlands Air Quality Improvement Programme that sought to develop policy in this area. It was intended to submit an Air Quality Options report to the WMCA Board setting out the implications of the Environment Bill currently in Parliament in respect of new powers for the WMCA and local authorities.

Councillor Waseem Zaffar noted that the Birmingham Clean Air Zone had already made a significant impact on air quality in Birmingham city centre, including a far higher rate of compliance than had been forecast. He suggested that the board might be interested in a presentation on the Clean Air Zone at its next meeting, and the Chair welcomed this suggestion.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

12.   Infrastructure for Zero Emission Vehicle Strategy Consultation

The board considered a report from the Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform and the Head of Environment on the progress in the development of the Infrastructure for Zero Emission Vehicle Strategy, some initial insights from the consultation process and a timescale by when the final strategy document would be available for publication.

The Chair noted that greater clarity was required on the key actions that would arise as a result of this strategy. The Energy Infrastructure Lead - Energy Capital indicated that the strategy would pursue a number of different solutions and options that would help inform investment decisions. In respect of hydrogen, this included supporting a study into the feasibility of establishing hydrogen hubs. The strategy would also help inform the work that was being undertaken to develop the forthcoming West Midlands Local Transport Plan.

Resolved:

The draft Infrastructure for Zero Emission Vehicle strategy be noted.

13. **COP26 Update**
The board received an update from the Partnerships and Engagement Strategic Lead on arrangements being made for the COP26 United Nations Climate Change Conference being held in Glasgow on 31 October - 12 November. He reported that the region intended to use the event as an opportunity to profile trade and investment in the West Midlands. There were also plans for a 'Domestic COP' which would involve regional green zone that would mirror the thematic days in Glasgow. It was expected that the West Midlands Regional Green Zone day would be held on 11 November.

The Chair indicated that he hoped COP26 would result in a plan for changing the behaviour of people and business and what was needed to be done at scale to effect change.

Resolved:

The update be noted.

14. **West Midlands Circular Economy Routemap**
The board considered a report from the Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform and the Head of Environment providing an overview of the West Midlands Circular Economy Routemap, as well as the next steps and recommendations for delivery. The report was to be considered by the WMCA Board on 17 September 2021.

The Chair stressed the importance of being focused on those elements that could make a difference at scale. He noted that much of the change to a circular economy would be driven by private businesses and therefore the outcomes needed to be realistic for businesses to achieve. Suzanne Ward noted the absence of water from the circular economy work and emphasised how much pressure already existed on the supply of water to business and residential properties.

Resolved:

The report be noted.

15. **Natural Environment Plan**

The board considered a report from the Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform and the Head of Environment setting out the final version of the first regional Natural Environment Plan (previously referred to as the Natural Capital Plan) which reflected on the independent advice from the WSP #WM2041 Five Year Plan and extensive stakeholder engagement with natural capital leads from regional organisations, including local authorities.

The Head of Environment reported that the Natural Environment Plan had been launched earlier in the week. It identified four priority areas and indicated where the role of the WMCA in each of these areas was to lead, to enable or to collaborate. It was working closely with local authorities across the region to help deliver the plan.

Resolved:

(1)   The final version of the Natural Environment Plan be noted.

(2)   The delivery of the actions contained within the plan be supported.

16. **Environment & Energy Programme Update**

The board considered a report from the Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform and the Head of Environment providing an overview of the environment and energy programme, including work on net zero, natural capital and circular economy. The report also covered an update on the enabling activity being put in place to ensure successful delivery, including behaviour change, business and community engagement, data and financing.

Resolved:

The environment and energy programme update be noted.

The meeting ended at 11.50am