



West Midlands Combined Authority

Environment & Energy Board

Thursday 1 December 2021 at 10.15am

Minutes

Present

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| Councillor Ian Courts (Chair) | Portfolio Lead for Environment, Energy & HS2 |
| Matthew Rhodes | Energy Capital |

Participating via Microsoft Teams

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| Jim Davies | Environment Agency |
| Councillor Steve Evans | City of Wolverhampton Council |
| Councillor Waseem Zaffar | Birmingham City Council |

In attendance

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| Councillor Peter Fowler | Overview & Scrutiny Committee |
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17. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Oliver Butler (Walsall), Councillor Maria Crompton (Sandwell), Councillor Andy Mackiewicz (Solihull), Councillor Simon Phipps (Dudley) and Suzanne Ward (Environment Agency).

18. Chair's Remarks

(a) Visit to Tyseley Energy Park

The Chair thanked Tyseley Energy Park for the guided tour of the facilities that had been given to members ahead of the meeting, and for hosting this particular meeting of the board.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

20. WMCA COP26 Briefing Note

The board considered a report of the Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform and the Head of Environment setting out the international outcomes that were agreed during the COP26 meeting in Glasgow held between 31 October - 12 November. The report also covered the Mayor's activities at COP26 in Glasgow and the 'COP26 Regional Roadshow' event hosted at the University of Wolverhampton.

One hundred and ninety-six countries met in Glasgow for the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26). The negotiations confirmed the importance of tackling climate change and the urgent need for drastic emission reductions. The COP resulted in an agreement referred to as the 'Glasgow Climate Pact'. The Government considered that this pact had kept the critical 1.5°C global warming goal alive, although the Nationally Determined Contributions continued to fall short of this target.

The Chair stressed the importance of maintaining the momentum created by the COP26 conference, including by taking advantage of the central location of the West Midlands in promoting local supply chains. The Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform indicated that work was being undertaken on a behaviour change programme and he would bring a report on this to a future meeting. Matthew Rhodes highlighted the role of food distribution in reducing carbon emissions, and the Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform also committed to bringing a report on this to a future meeting. Councillor Waseem Zaffar highlighted the importance of the HydroFLEX hydrogen-ready passenger train in helping Birmingham in its ambitions to promote and develop the hydrogen economy.

Resolved:

- (1) The report outlining the implications of the COP26 conference in Glasgow be noted.
- (2) The next steps to build on the work at COP26 be noted and supported.

21. Natural Environment Update

The board considered a report of the Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform and the Head of Environment on progress in delivering the Natural Environment Plan, particularly on Local Nature Recovery Strategies, a bid to the Woodland Trust to establish a West Midlands Forest Partnership and progress on the Community Green Grants.

The Natural Environment Plan articulated a vision for the region, bringing together different initiatives covering a broad range of natural environment projects focusing on tree and hedgerow planting, improving access to green space for all communities across the West Midlands and developing wildlife corridors. The aim of the plan was to improve these environments in their own right, promoting biodiversity net gain, as well as for all the region's communities to enjoy.

The Chair stressed the importance of this work linking with local authority planning policies. The Natural Capital Programme Manager indicated that Natural England was yet to fully understand how Natural Environment Plans aligned with, and influenced, Local Development Plans. Councillor Waseem Zaffar highlighted how the pandemic had increased the value local communities now placed on green and blue space, and he welcomed the work outlined within the report. The Chair recognised that defining communities was an important part of this work, and the Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform explained that the New Economics Foundation had undertaken a mapping exercise in support of this which he would share with the board.

Resolved:

- (1) The progress of the different elements of the natural environment programme be noted.
- (2) The West Midlands Forest Partnership concept be supported.
- (3) The progress of conversations with Natural England on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy be supported.

22. Energy Capital Governance

The board considered a report of the Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform and the Director of Energy Capital seeking to ensure that the consultation that Energy Capital would be undertaking with constituent authorities regarding its future governance was formally considered and supported by the WMCA. The issues raised within the report would be discussed with constituent authorities directly over the next three months.

Energy Capital was established in 2016 as part of the creation of the WMCA to develop and take forward energy devolution asks, set out in the original devolution deal, as originally advocated by the Black Country LEP. Since 2016, the Energy Capital Board, containing strong energy sector and local leadership representation, had reported into the Strategic Economic Development Board and, more recently, this board. With the increased emphasis on climate change mitigation, the approval and focus on delivery of the #WM2041 five year plan, and developments in national energy system governance, the Energy Capital Board felt that it was timely and important to set out what it believed was the most effective governance model to achieve these goals going forward.

The Chair welcomed the report but stressed the importance of constituent authorities understanding clearly the current governance mode of the Energy Capital Board and why the proposed changes would lead to better outcomes. The Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform highlighted the vast infrastructure that underpinned energy production and supply within the country, and the proposed governance changes were being driven by a desire to enable local authorities to become engaged and involved in this work to a greater extent.

Resolved:

It be noted that Energy Capital was undertaking a review of its governance in the light of national and regional energy system developments, and the outcomes of this review be considered by the WMCA as part of its own current governance review.

23. Energy Collaboration Days

The Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform reported that plans were currently being developed that would enable energy sector representatives to work out of Tyseley Energy Park on a monthly basis to help improve engagement, collaboration and network opportunities between them.

Resolved:

The proposals to create energy collaboration days be noted and supported.

24. Any Other Business

(a) West Midlands Climate Risk Assessment and Adaptation Plan 2021-26

Jim Davies reported that Sustainability West Midlands had worked with the Environment Agency to produce a West Midlands Climate Risk Assessment and Adaptation Plan. The plan set out the climate change adaptation actions that should be considered for implementation by decision makers in the West Midlands, to ensure that the natural environment, people, infrastructure, buildings and businesses were prepared for the impacts of climate change, including greater incidence and severity of flooding, a higher likelihood of water scarcity and more intense and prolonged heatwaves. He undertook to circulate to board members a copy of the plan for their information.

25. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 3 March 2022 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 11.40am