



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Environment & Energy Board

Wednesday 9 March 2022 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Ian Courts (Chair)

Councillor Ahmad Bostan

Councillor Oliver Butler

Councillor Steve Evans

Councillor Andy Mackiewicz

Matthew Rhodes

Portfolio Lead for Environment, Energy & HS2

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

City of Wolverhampton Council

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Energy Capital

In Attendance

Mairi Clarkson

Ed Cox

Jim Davies

Angela Eason

Councillor Peter Fowler

Neil Griffiths

Cheryl Hiles

Jacqueline Homan

Katie Jepson

Rachel Jones

Paul McGrath

Richard Rees

Aqeel Rizvi

Simon Ross

George Simms

Councillor Laura Taylor-Childs

West Midlands Combined Authority

West Midlands Combined Authority

Environment Agency

Act On Energy

Birmingham City Council

West Midlands Fire Service

Energy Capital

West Midlands Combined Authority

West Midlands Combined Authority

Act On Energy

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

West Midlands Combined Authority

West Midlands Combined Authority

Marches Energy Agency

West Midlands Combined Authority

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Item Title

No.

26. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed attendees to the hybrid meeting and thanked attendees for either attending in person at Summer Lane or virtually.

The Chair noted a petition and public letter received to the board that was forwarded to the WMCA for noting.

27. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Simon Phipps and Councillor Waseem Zaffar.

28. Notice of Substitutes

Councillor Laura Taylor-Childs for Councillor Simon Phipps.

29. Minutes - 1 December 2021

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

30. Behaviour Change - Retrofit, Right Tree Right Place and CWG Food

The Environment Behaviour Change Project Officer provided a presentation to update the board on delivery of the Behaviour Change Programme and future work.

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) was commissioned in May 2021 to create a strategy and plan for how the WMCA influence people's behaviour to achieve net zero by 2041. Within the research, BIT used different framings within environment communications to understand what messaging resonated the most with the public and recommended environmental communications should be kept simple wherever possible and to align messaging on climate change with co-benefits of promoting behaviour changes such as improving health. In addition, BIT surveyed almost 2,000 people across the region to understand the most effective messaging for communications and found the most popular strapline of 'West Midlands Greener Together' emerged with branding guidelines and logos now developed and in use for communications by the Energy and Environment teams at the WMCA. The Environment Behaviour Change Project Officer noted however that communications alone would have a limited impact on scaled and sustained behaviour changes and would be most effective in tandem with behaviour change initiatives BIT had identified on three areas of focus for an implementation plan on the natural environment, sustainable food and home retrofit.

The Environment Behaviour Change Project Officer outlined from the presentation an update from the three focus areas of the campaign work for natural environment, sustainable food and home retrofit, noting key highlights to date and future work plans for each.

The Environment Behaviour Change Project Officer noted from the presentation there would also be citizen engagement, which would consist of a Net Zero Panel to allow the public to co-design and co-produce elements of the developing Environment team and Energy Capital work and a West Midlands Greener Together Forum to create a space for environmental non-governmental organisations, community groups, the public and others from across the region to discuss the route to net zero and inspire collaboration.

Furthermore, as part of creating a legacy from the Commonwealth Games, the WMCA was in partnership with the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee's Sustainability team in creating carbon literacy training for volunteers, citizens and businesses within the region to enable people to understand and confidently communicate the climate emergency and identification of actions, as well as the WMCA having successfully applied on to the Local Climate Engagement Programme to support local authorities and partnerships to plan, commission and deliver high quality public engagement with climate decision-making to benefit both the WMCA and the local population.

The Chair remarked on the recent positive climate emergency ratings and rankings of the WMCA and local authorities in the region and thanked officers for their work that reflected a plan for action represented from positive behaviour changes.

The Chair noted his observations from the report and firstly commented on the 'Right Tree Right Place' within the Natural Environment Plan to outline the importance and value of tree planting, hedges for biodiversity and risk of gardens not being developed on, loss of trees from people who may see them as a nuisance and collaboration with landowners to identify available land for tree planting. The Chair also noted the importance of sustainable food being local and a skills differentiation between new build and retrofit homes to lobby government through the Sustainable Funding Programme.

In response to a question from Matthew Rhodes who enquired if there would be a link between the tree programme and circular economic opportunities in the use of tree waste being turned in to biochar to fertilise street trees, the Head of Environment advised Birmingham City Council were undertaking work on this with their tree nurseries but that the WMCA could also investigate as part of the circular economic workstreams.

Resolved:

- (1) The opportunity and resources available for Councillors through 'Involves Local Climate Engagement Programme' on participatory and deliberative public engagement was noted.
- (2) The Commonwealth Games Carbon Literacy training for volunteers, citizens and businesses across the region was noted.
- (3) The consideration of local leaders to engage in future behaviour change campaigns and support the communications activity was noted.

31. Levelling Up White Paper

The Director of Inclusive Growth and Public Service Reform gave a verbal report to outline the Levelling Up White Paper as well as the process established at the WMCA for exploration and the offers and asks to put forward to government in relation to a trailblazer devolution deal offered by government to the WMCA and Greater Manchester Combined Authority to negotiate further deals unlike other areas in England.

The Levelling Up White Paper was published on 2 February 2022. Within the paper, it defined 'levelling up' as:

- Increasing opportunity across the UK, and
- Reducing disparities between and within regions.

The WMCA had identified 20 workstreams to address with government for levelling up, with one of the workstreams being net zero so that energy and environment was incorporated in to all other workstreams in housing, regeneration, planning, health, social capital and social economy.

There had been several informal meetings of the mayor, local authority leaders and other regional stakeholders, as well as initial meetings with government officials and ministerial aides where several principles had been articulated to help guide the trailblazer devolution deal process.

Following these discussions, the Director of Inclusive Growth and Public Service Reform referenced from the report the six devolution asks over the three areas of stimulating the low carbon and smart energy sector, decarbonisation of heat (retrofit) and local area energy planning.

The full extent of the timetable for the trailblazer devolution deal was not known, however the WMCA planned to have a draft proposal by June 2022 for submission to government before summer recess.

The Chair thanked the Director of Inclusive Growth and Public Service Reform and his team for their work on devolution to the region but noted concerns that the report did not reference the transport agenda such as vehicles in reducing emissions and improved transport routing, identification of best practices and products for retrofit use and to be mindful of language used for energy planning for the public to understand and have headings that are meaningful and showcase action for simplification.

Matthew Rhodes extended his thanks to the WMCA in having a framework for engagement but noted concern of the industrial decarbonisation in employment of people within the region for achieving net zero being a challenge and threat to jobs. Matthew noted that resolving the issue of a transition from the current economic base to net zero was most important for retainment in productivity of skilled jobs in the region and was a huge task. Matthew noted positive investment opportunities such as the Gigafactory in Coventry would provide great opportunities for greener technologies for the future, however further opportunities and investment in reconfiguring foundries in the black Country in enabling green fuels, employment of people and production of cleaner products would be required from the WMCA and public sector to support this transition.

Resolved:

- (1) The publication of the Levelling Up White Paper and reflections on its implications for the WMCA area was noted.

- (2) Feedback on the collaborative governance for development of the trailblazer devolution deal was considered.
- (3) The opportunities to maximise environment and energy within the trailblazer devolution deal was considered.

32. Retrofit - SMART Hub and Net Zero Neighbourhood

The SMART Hub Lead for the WMCA provided a presentation to update on progress on the Energy Capital team's SMART Hub (Sustainable Market for Affordable Retrofit Technologies) Programme, which focussed on home retrofit for getting homes in the region to net zero and reducing fuel poverty.

The priorities of the SMART Hub were to increase knowledge and capacity for retrofit in local authorities and social landlords, make the most of available funding and find ways to leverage funding and finance, support supply chain growth and increase demand.

The aim of the SMART Hub programme was to build capacity across local authorities and other partner organisations in the region and to lay the foundations for longer term growth in the market for home retrofit. These aims would be grouped in to three activities of capacity building, demonstrator projects and market development support to establish which the SMART Hub Lead outlined the current and future activities, as well as opportunities in greater detail during the presentation.

The Chair noted from the report he would like to have seen an emphasis on what the solutions were to obstacles and barriers for retrofit homes and raised points on components within the supply chain, standardisation of builds and promotion of systems and practices for officers to note and consider.

Resolved:

- (1) The work of the SMART Hub in supporting retrofit across the WMCA area was noted.

33. Marches Energy Agency and Act on Energy

Rachel Jones (Act on Energy) and Simon Ross (Marches Energy Agency) gave the board their verbal personal experiences in the delivery of retrofit programmes, particularly local authority delivery schemes and an update on the Sustainable Warmth Programme.

Rachel Jones firstly noted the energy price cap coming in April and then October that would cause an increase in fuel and energy bills had initiated an unprecedented demand in contact from families, younger and single people for services to receive advice and support to enable solutions for the short and longer-term alongside interventions already announced by government on council tax support, rebate on energy bills. Rachel Jones noted that 70% of families had enquired about the existing household support fund administered by local authorities. Rachel Jones noted the importance of taking householders on a journey due to the concern in unaffordability of householders to heat their homes to prepare for.

Simon Ross provided an update of the Sustainable Warmth Programme funding held within the Marches Energy Agency to provide customer support and offering a 'hand holding' role for householders across the WMCA area where the funding flowed from the Midlands Energy Hub. The Marches Energy Agency provided a wealth of support to householders in obtaining new technology and heating controls for people's homes and where eligibility was not met, further support offered through other initiatives such as home visits for low-cost measures, billing support, negotiations between householders with energy suppliers and loft and cavity wall insulation. Simon Ross outlined the support to local authorities to help with area-based mapping for the next round of Sustainability Warmth Competition funding from 1 April and providing internal briefing notes and monthly reports to move the programme forward. Simon Ross noted that from a householder perspective was surprised by the vulnerability of householders coming forward into the program and the amount of work needed to effectively hand hold them through the process, as well as during and after the install process due to supply chain stresses and workmanship not being as it was post-install to ensure the technology was usable for householders. Simon Ross noted the importance of local authority representatives to please support us to support your officers who are doing this program to make sure they've got all the support they need internally to unblock blockages.

Rachel Jones and Simon Ross offered meetings with councillors on further information they could provide for supporting their local authority areas and the importance of prioritising the price cap agenda especially with just under £20million of the Sustainable Warmth Fund Programme being received in to the WMCA to ensure it is all spent and to promote for the public who don't have smart meter readings to take a meter reading prior to the 1 April price cap.

The Chair noted the importance of 'hand-holding' as a difference between a job well done and not well done in that people feel looked after in that process where quite often an attitude of fall off can occur.

In response to a question from Councillor Peter Fowler who queried the concern, frustration and fear some members of the public may have to installing smart meters, Rachel Jones noted the importance of householders having a smart meter to accurately record energy use to suppliers whilst householders can monitor and adjust usage accordingly.

In response to a question from the Chair on whether smart meters can tell householders what utility items generate the greatest energy increase, Simon Ross noted by experimenting with different household utility devices to see from the smart meter interface a spiked or slow increase would enable this transparency, however it was unknown if householders were aware to do this with the Chair noting information given to householders to advise would help.

Agreed:

- (1) The Chair noted that not all councils in the West Midlands region were present or represented at the meeting and requested for a letter, e-mail, or press release to be sent to all Constituent and Non-Constituent Authorities to advise of funding available to support residents. The Director of Inclusive Growth and Public Service Reform agreed for the WMCA to work with Rachel Jones and Simon Ross to promote this.

[The meeting ended at 11:57am]