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Comments from Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

These comments relate to agenda item 13 - West of England Energy Strategy

COMMENTS FROM CHAIR OF WECA OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TO BE SUBMITTED TO: JOINT COMMITTEE – 1 FEBRUARY 2019

Subject – West of England Energy Strategy (agenda item 13)

At our meeting held on 23 January 2019, the WECA Overview & Scrutiny Committee received a detailed presentation on the proposed Energy Strategy.

This is a summary of the committee's comments – I also hope to speak at the Joint Committee meeting on these points:

1. In our view, the document as presented at the meeting did not at this stage form a properly constituted strategy document. As presented, the document is more of a high-level “strategic framework” document and it was felt that this should be recognised.
2. The committee was concerned that at the time of their meeting they had not had sight of the evidence base underpinning the proposed strategy. However, subsequent to our meeting, further detail has been included in background documents published with the agenda papers for your meeting today and these contain much valuable work.
3. In discussion at our meeting, it was noted that it is the intention to work up a detailed action plan with clear measurable objectives. The committee wish to take an active role in helping to scope and then monitor progress on this. [Subsequent to the meeting I have noted that the May 2018 CSE report could be a good starting point for the action plan stage, if approval of the high-level strategy is agreed today, as it offers 22 recommendations and a great deal of detail].
4. Committee members had some concerns about the proposed governance model. In the West of England region there is a great deal of leadership in the wider sustainability stakeholder community as well as at local authority level. Leadership for a LEP energy strategy does not have to come only from the LEP Board or WECA officers, as the governance arrangements as outlined imply. Members considered that there could be a more inclusive approach that involves the existing wider community, its expertise and relationships. At a minimum, there should at least be some non-WECA/LEP/LA stakeholder representation in the governance arrangements. In line with this, we suggest that an open approach to the action plan and delivery stages would almost certainly be the best approach. For example, there could be a “sustainability/low carbon sector” workshop involving stakeholders.
5. It was noted that this work has been taken forward in accordance with government guidelines /requirements. Nevertheless, the committee expressed concern that emissions from aircraft using Bristol Airport are not included in the analysis of carbon emissions impact for the region (as they should be under Scope 3 of the Greenhouse Gas Protocol if that is the measurement being used). This is especially relevant in view of its planned expansion from 8m passengers a year to 12m and then 20m.
6. In the committee's view, the region should be as ambitious as possible and seek the highest possible standards in relation to carbon emissions. Ideally these should support the ambitious target proposed by Bristol City Council to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. This level of ambition should be reflected in the strategy and this target should be specifically mentioned and supported. As one member noted, any perceived lack of West of England ambition risks its reputation as a low carbon/sustainability leader, and other LEPs overtaking the region.

This could put at risk the many jobs in sustainability that could be generated in the region in this sector.

Councillor Stephen Clarke
Chair, WECA Overview & Scrutiny Committee