



Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee

29 January 2025

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| Title: | Director's Highlight Report |
| Report of: | Judith Barker, Executive Director for Place and Connectivity |
| Lead Member: | Cllr. Bridget Smith, Lead Member for Communities and Environment |
| Public Report: | Yes |
| Key Decision: | No |
| Voting Arrangements: | A No vote required |

Recommendations:

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| A | Note the content of this report. |
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Strategic Objective(s):

The proposals within this report fit under the following strategic objective(s):

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| x | Achieving good growth |
| x | Increased connectivity |
| x | Enabling resilient communities |

1. Purpose

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| 1.1 | This report provides a general update on the key activities of the Place and Connectivity Directorate in relation to Environment and Sustainable Communities, which are not covered in the other reports to this Meeting. |
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2. Updates regarding National Government & partners

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| 2.1 | Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England The Board agreed at its November meeting to develop a Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England. The Strategic Place Partnership is a model developed by Homes England to enable greater collaboration and partnership working at a sub-regional scale. This recognises those places with ambitious proposals for place-based growth and regeneration. It is not a commitment for capital funding but a shared document tailored to local priorities that can be jointly resourced to accelerate new housing delivery. |
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The SPP is supported by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between CPCA and Homes England. The MoU is due to be signed on 29 January 2025. This leads to the development of a Partnership Business Plan for a five-year period and an Annual Delivery Plan.

The SPP will ensure the region, through the CPCA, can influence and shape the investment priorities of Homes England for our area. In addition, this will lead to opportunities of finance and resources to help deliver the CPCA Shared Ambition (for which Homes England are a contributor) and the emerging Local Growth Plan.

Updates will be brought to future committees.

2.2

English Devolution White Paper

The government published the English Devolution White Paper on 16 December 2024. This has specific references to climate and environment activity. The White Paper indicates that Strategic Authorities including CPCA should undertake strategic level coordination on these issues, where it adds value.

Clean Energy

In pursuit of the Clean Energy mission, the White Paper states that Great British Energy will be tasked to work with local government through the Local Power Plan to support the roll out of small-medium renewable energy projects. This is expected to provide support for Strategic and Local Authorities, as well as community energy groups to deploy up to 8GW of additional power from small-medium sized generation projects by 2030. It should help Strategic and Local Authorities to build their own 'pipelines' of successful projects. In addition, the Government is establishing 'heat network zoning' in England. It intends that zoning coordinators, within Strategic Authorities, will be able to designate areas as heat network zones.

Funding for warmer homes and greener buildings will form part of future Integrated Settlements. CPCA does not expect to receive an Integrated Settlement under the current timetable until 2027/28. The schemes currently in scope for those settlements are the Warm Homes: Local Grant, the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund, and the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.

Health and Wellbeing

The White Paper also sets out proposals in relation to Health and Wellbeing. The government is introducing a new bespoke duty for Strategic Authorities in relation to health improvement and health inequalities. Strategic Authorities have to have regard to the need to improve health, and the need to reduce health inequalities, in the exercise of their functions. This is intended to complement the existing health improvement duty held by upper-tier Local Authorities. Government will engage Strategic Authorities, Local Authorities and the NHS to take this forward. There are also proposals around more Mayoral involvement in Integrated Care Partnerships.

Resilience

Depending on the outcome of its ongoing review of national resilience, the government may amend the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to recognise Strategic Authorities as a categorised responder, meaning that they would adopt the duties and responsibilities of a member of the Local Resilience Forum.

Strategic Planning

As part of the Government's commitment to move towards a universal system of strategic planning all areas, both areas with a Strategic Authority and those without, will be required to develop Spatial Development Strategies.

Further Devolution

Future opportunities for devolution and partnership working are to be explored with Strategic Authorities. Government considers these could include issues like water management, the circular economy, pollution, or flood resilience. Government intends to explore how Strategic Authorities and Mayors can provide greater local leadership in responding to the impacts of climate change, and a better route for rural communities to be considered in local policy decision making.

The White Paper was published in December 2024 and the Combined Authority will be considering its response to the White Paper and on next steps with constituent authorities into 2025.

3. Regional Updates

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| 3.1 | <p>Local Nature Recovery Strategy</p> <p>Progress was reported to the Committee in December.</p> <p>Additional resource was secured from the Wildlife Trust to assist with the methodology and drafting of the strategy.</p> <p>The LNRS Steering Group meets in January to consider the output of this additional work. It will particularly focus on the habitats mapping methodology. This is crucial stage in the development of the strategy as it is followed by the second Mapping Workshop in February that will examine what this means 'on the ground'.</p> <p>This stage of work is in line with the agreed timetable that enables a draft strategy being tabled to the June committee. A full progress update to Committee is scheduled for the Committee's February meeting.</p> |
| 3.2 | <p>Energy</p> <p>A meeting was held with the Secretary of State for DESNZ and the Mayors on 5 December 2024.</p> |
| 3.3 | <p>Greater South East Net Zero Hub</p> <p>The presentation given on the work of the Hub to the Committee at its December meeting is being presented to the CPCA Board at its January meeting.</p> <p>At the meeting on 3 December 2024, the Hub Board recommended the approval of 21 applications to the Community Energy Fund with a combined value of £843,090. The Hub has allocated its budget and is seeking additional funds from DESNZ to support these projects.</p> <p>The Hub's Local Net Zero Investment Readiness Grant is now closed for applications. The £1million fund is for grants up to £75K for technical or commercial support that will result in investment. The fund is oversubscribed, with 23 applications for £1.7million, these projects are in appraisal and will be determined at the Hub Board in March 2025.</p> |
| 3.4 | <p>Forward Agenda items</p> <p>The next Committee is scheduled to receive reports on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Affordable Housing Programme and Quarterly Performance and Budget Report . A presentation will be provided on the Local Area Energy Plan project and the work of Action on Energy. The Work Programme is an item on the Agenda today.</p> <p>Two workshops are being arranged. The first will cover the Opportunity Fund submissions and the second will cover the Local Growth Plan.</p> |

4. Appendices

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| 4.1 | None. |
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5. Implications

Financial Implications

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| 5.1 | None. |
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Legal Implications

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| 6.1 | None. |
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Public Health Implications

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| 7.1 | Climate and infrastructure developments can have major positive and negative impacts on public health. |
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| Environmental & Climate Change Implications | |
| 8.1 | None. |
| Other Significant Implications | |
| 9.1 | None. |
| Background Papers | |
| 10.1 | None. |