

Smart Local Energy Systems: West Midlands Stakeholder Analysis and Feedback

Lead Organisation:

Sustainability West Midlands

Project Team: Anna Bright, Dr Beck Collins and Nathaniel Weaver

Customers:



WM Sustainability Roadmap themes addressed:



Project Duration:

April – June 2022

The Project:

Smart Local Energy Systems (SLES) are critical to the decarbonisation of the UK energy system. An energy system relying more heavily on intermittent renewable energy sources needs to be more efficient with the energy available and be able to accept more energy inputs locally than is currently the case. A SLES can do this, and councils have an important role to play in their development. As part of their work delivering SLES, Energy Capital needed to understand what council officers and elected members already knew about SLES, and what might be the most fruitful key messages about SLES to build understanding and inspire them to advocate for a greater role in progressing them.

Aims:

The aim of the project was to explore the perceptions of SLES held by councillors and officers, and action towards the delivery of SLES, in rural and urban councils across the wider West Midlands.

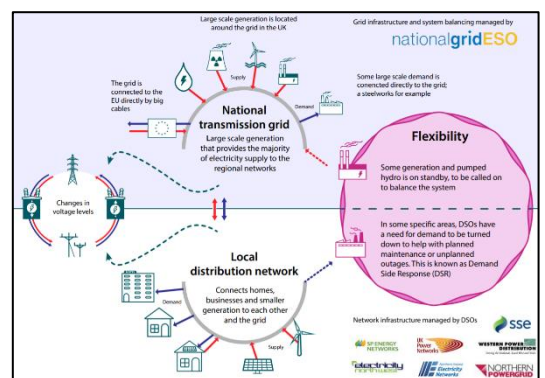


Figure 1: SLES (Image by Regen)

This knowledge was used to provide recommendations for a communications strategy to support the role of councils in progressing SLES. This was done through a document review and 21 interviews with elected members and officers.

Outcomes:

SWM produced a report which revealed a contested and nuanced picture. There was a spectrum of understanding of SLES; some did not fully appreciate the ‘smart’ or ‘systems’ aspects of SLES, while others displayed a knowledge and enthusiasm for decentralised and decarbonised energy. Interviewees highlighted challenges around lateral working across councils, external stakeholder engagement, the feasibility of SLES projects, resource challenges when engaging with SLES and energy, risk aversion around new technologies, and the need to ensure the energy transition does not lead to lower quality jobs. A strong motivator for most interviewees to engage with the issue of energy was the immediate impact energy costs were having on local householders and businesses. Following from this, a key recommendation is that the communications strategy strongly highlights the immediate local benefits to ordinary people, in non-technical language, that come from the building of SLES.

The report also made several recommendations as to how Energy Capital could assist council officers and elected members to engage with and drive forward SLES, and what communications would be needed for this.

In the Future:

SWM continue to work with Energy Capital to decarbonise energy in the region, playing an active role in their [Energy Collaboration Days](#), and facilitating ideas and connections through SWM’s related work in innovation.

Accolades:

“This project will form the foundation of a communications strategy which will enable us to get the buy in we need to successfully deliver Smart Local Energy Systems in the West Midlands. The insights it provides will be instrumental in understanding key messages and channels needed to communicate effectively”. Kate Ashworth, Energy Infrastructure Lead, Energy Capital

Contact Details:

For further information on the project please contact the SWM team at enquiries@swm.org.uk.