

Fit for the Future II

Lead Organisation:

Sustainability West Midlands

Project Manager: Anna Bright (Chief Executive)

Partners:



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Customers:

Board members, managers and officers who work for or on behalf of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), devolved areas and city regions and their local authorities.

Project Duration:

July 2017 – November 2017

The Project

Are we Fit for the Future?

SWM first asked whether we are Fit for the Future [in 2015](#) when we produced the first ever report that analysed LEP progress and appetite to tackle climate change, embrace a low carbon economy and reduce carbon emissions. We were asked to build on this piece of work by BEIS in 2017 that:

- Re-assessed LEPs on this agenda and compared how they have progressed between 2015 and 2017.
- Provided an analysis of progress of eleven core cities on the same agenda.
- Provided an indication of the progress related to energy devolution in the nine newly-formed combined authorities in England.

This project consisted of two distinct parts: (1) the production of a suite of reports reflecting good practice and recommendations related to the above and (2) a national event to stimulate learning featuring representatives from LEPs, city regions and combined authorities.

Methodology

The work aimed to assess the commitments of all 38 LEPs in England to reducing carbon emissions, stimulating a low carbon economy and adapting to climate change as well as benchmark eleven city regions and nine combined authorities on their progress towards the same. The reports provided an analysis of each of these areas against each of these three metrics and with respect to LEPs we compared them to their positioning in 2015 and discussed geographical progression patterns.

Regarding the LEP analysis, we analysed the European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF) strategy, Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and latest Annual Report of each LEP as well as each of their websites for details on active projects. We also interviewed a representative from each LEP to get a more accurate feel for what activities are happening on the ground. We also undertook interviews with representatives from city regions and scrutinised literature that reflected activity in cities and combined authorities, including local authority climate change strategies and mayoral manifestos.

Crucially, based on our findings, the reports contain recommendations for both LEP, combined authority and city region representatives themselves and for those national and regional bodies that support these entities in terms of what they can do to improve their performance.

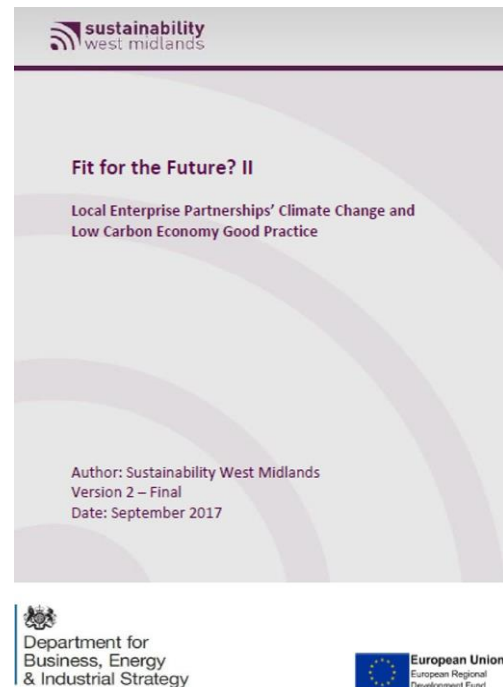
We then convened an event – Fit for the Future II – that brought together representatives from LEPs, city regions, combined authorities and national bodies who have influence over these, to allow for an opportunity to network with peers and learn from national expertise.

Ultimately, BEIS commissioned SWM to undertake this piece of work to analyse the extent to which low carbon investment is being considered across the country, whether this investment is resilient, considerations for a post-Brexit Britain and whether we are, indeed, Fit for the Future.

Aims

The primary aims of the report and the event were as follows:

- To promote existing good practice in climate adaptation, mitigation and promoting the low carbon economy through the identification of case studies.
- To identify where each LEP, city region and combined authority requires improvement either through communicating existing good practice through published documents or by addressing gaps in activities on the ground.
- To provide a methodology and benchmark that can be repeated annually to help identify further good practice and progress and provide a clearer national set of criteria for LEPs, city regions and combined authorities to work towards on this agenda.
- To provide recommendations on how government can further improve the support for LEPs, city regions and combined authorities in the delivery of this agenda.
- To help environmental and sustainability champions within LEP/combined authority Boards, Advisory Committees and ESIF committees to make connections and therefore develop potential future joint projects.



- Provide a forum for national environmental bodies to present their existing offers of help and understand future support needs in this area.

Challenges

Challenges faced in the development of this project included the following.

- Interviews: In order to address gaps from the 2015 assessment that focused on LEPs, the decision was made to interview LEPs and city regions to gain a more accurate picture of national activity. This was successful but concurrently challenging; often finding the right person to speak to, particularly in a LEP, was very difficult. In some cases, we had to contact LEPs around five times to find an individual to eventually undertake the interviews and by the conclusion of the research, we had successfully run an interview with 36 out of 38 LEPs.
- Sensitivity: One of the key aspects of the report was ranking each LEP, city region and combined authority in terms of their commitments to climate resilience, mitigation and stimulating a low carbon economy, plus an overall ranking of the averages of these three metrics. There was much debate between ourselves and partners around whether we should do this as some authorities lower down the list may not appreciate being, on the face of it, named and shamed. However, we were pleased to keep these league tables in, because it transpired that it was this that initially made the audience stand up and take notice of the report.

There were three other challenges that manifested when we undertook the research for the first report in 2015 that we overcame in this latest version:

- Mapping: In 2015, we had to use a third party's GIS software to complete the maps showing spatial patterns of progress. This time we were able to acquire software and expertise in-house that made producing the maps much easier.
- Event: Last time, the main challenge in running the event was gaining national contacts from outside the West Midlands. This was far easier in 2017 because (1) the first event gave us introductions to a repository of national contacts, (2) the interviews allowed us to gain even more of these and re-establish relationships and (3) the project funders, BEIS, also had some national contacts that we could align with ours.





- We asked last time whether the literature findings matched reality. We already appreciated that what is projected in an ESIF strategy or a SEP may not transpire into actual action on the ground. In 2017, the interviews clearly helped us to identify this activity and we also interrogated each website more closely and looked specifically at pages that reflected relevant projects led by the LEP, city region or combined authority.

The Outcome

Results

Benefits to the partners

Promoting their offer: More than ever, BEIS wants to support local areas and help them develop their energy and low carbon attributes and assets, as the team recognises its economic value as well as how associated projects can contribute to the low carbon/environmental agenda. The event provided BEIS with a chance to get their offer of support heard directly to the correct individuals.

Identifying gaps and challenges: How and what support BEIS offers is the most important aspect of this piece of work. Delegates at the event and via the interviews could tell us exactly what their challenges were and how they envisage that BEIS could support them to enable them to embrace the low carbon agenda.

Sharing success: Benchmarking authorities in this way identifies where success is found and the components that are required to gain this success in the first place. BEIS has the ability to roll out good practice examples across the country where appropriate and so knowing where these examples are was critical.

Benefits to the customers

Sharing good practice: Peer-to-peer learning is often the most effective way to encourage other organisations to improve their performance. We have included a suite of case studies in the reports reflecting impressive work related to the climate change, energy and low carbon agenda that have been led by local partners and we also included four good practice speakers at the Fit for the Future II event.

Identifying opportunities for support: Support and guidance on this agenda can seem fragmented and often it is hard to identify who the right people are to speak to. The event, in particular, helped to clarify some of this by outlining the support that BEIS has to offer, especially recent funding to enable each LEP in England to develop an energy strategy.

Benefits to Sustainability West Midlands

SWM can provide support to LEPs and now we have further evidence showing what sort of support is required, it gives us the confidence to intervene and engage in the right way and with knowledge. The work we have done will also begin to contribute to some of our more local economic-based targets in line with our 2020 vision, such as:

- *“The West Midlands is a hub for low-carbon technology innovation and an international supplier, increasing productivity by 30%.*
- *There has been growth in the building refurbishment industry and the manufacture of wind turbines, fuel cells and fittings.*
- *Investment in the motor industry has taken advantage of the ‘green motoring’ market.*
- *Up-skilling programmes have equipped the local workforce with skills to enter new job markets.*
- *Many communities and businesses own micro-generation facilities to produce their own energy.”*

In the Future

SWM would like to build on the two Fit for the Future events and pieces of research and maintain momentum and engagement. Support is now forthcoming from central government which we are delighted to have influenced, but we believe that continuing momentum is crucial. In a year’s time, all LEPs will have developed an energy strategy and devolved areas will be more mature. So, the question will be: what’s next? We hope we can be a part of continuing to provide the answer.

We would also call on other national organisations that can support LEPs, city regions and combined authorities to show their hand and offer their support too, especially in this tumultuous time considering Brexit and the implications from a funding and legislative perspective. We will continue to press for a national offer to be developed, led by BEIS and featuring bespoke areas of support by other bodies including Natural England, Environment Agency, Innovate UK, the Catapults and any other suitable organisations. SWM would welcome the opportunity to facilitate this.

The Extra's

Accolades

Two delegates from the event quoted:

"Really good event; huge amount of learning and ideas generated. It is an essential fixture to bring LEPs up-to-speed with peers and experts. Thanks."

"This was a fantastic event – thanks for inviting me, great networking."

On working with SWM, BEIS said:

"SWM is one of the few organisations with the experience and reputation we needed to analyse the progress that LEPs, combined authorities and core cities are making on the energy and low carbon agendas. We valued their attention to detail and extensive research techniques, along with their ability to summarise the findings and present them in a clear and concise manner. It was also important to us to work with an independent organisation like SWM who were able to provide honest and realistic recommendations for BEIS and the relevant authorities to take away and reflect on. These will help us to strengthen the low carbon economy across the country."

Links and Downloads

[Fit for the Future II reports](#)

[Fit for the Future II event outputs](#)

Contact Details

For further information on our work with the LEPs or to work with us in one of a variety of ways, please contact the SWM team on 0121 237 5890 or enquiries@swm.org.uk.