



England's Economic Heartland Board

18 June 2026

Item 9: Business Unit Update

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Notes the progress made on regional energy systems planning and the emerging approach to regional coordination.**
- b) Agrees that EEH should provide a light-touch coordination role to support regional energy systems planning, subject to local authority agreement and the identification of an appropriate funding mechanism.**
- c) Reviews the regional priorities table (Annex 1), which is updated ahead of each Board meeting to reflect EEH work.**

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on regional energy systems planning activity, including discussions with local authority partners on representation to the Regional Energy Strategic Plan (RESP) Board and the potential role of EEH in supporting regional coordination. This report also presents the latest version of the EEH regional priorities table (Annex 1), which is updated ahead of each board meeting to reflect progress against agreed priorities, emerging workstreams and key regional developments.

2. Key points of note

- 2.1. Energy systems planning is becoming increasingly important to the delivery of housing, economic growth, transport decarbonisation and wider infrastructure priorities across the region.
- 2.2. Discussions have taken place with local authority partners, including Oxfordshire County Council's Energy Systems Team, regarding the implications of the emerging national energy systems planning framework and the need for effective regional coordination.
- 2.3. A preferred approach is emerging whereby local authority representation on the RESP Board is aligned with Spatial Development Strategy geographies, recognising the relationship between energy infrastructure, housing delivery, economic growth and strategic planning.
- 2.4. There is a recognised need for a local-authority-led coordination arrangement to support collaboration and information sharing between representatives and authorities across the region.
- 2.5. The regional priorities table continues to be updated to reflect progress against the Board's agreed priorities, including work relating to transport integration, bus connectivity, major infrastructure schemes, housing growth and economic development.

- 2.6. Several priorities within the table, including East West Rail integration, Transport Opportunity Plans, the Buses in Bedfordshire programme and the Total Transport Toolkit, continue to progress and support wider regional ambitions around connectivity and sustainable growth.
- 2.7. Board Members are invited to review the updated priorities table and provide any comments on emerging priorities or future areas of focus.

3. Context - Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs)

- 3.1. The creation of RESPs represents a significant change in the way energy infrastructure planning will be undertaken across England. The plans will play an important role in identifying future energy requirements and investment priorities, supporting the delivery of housing growth, economic development, transport decarbonisation and wider infrastructure ambitions.
- 3.2. Given the cross-boundary nature of many energy challenges and opportunities, there is a strong case for local authorities within the EEH region to work collaboratively to ensure regional priorities are appropriately reflected within the RESP process. In January 2026, Board Members agreed that they supported this approach.
- 3.3. EEH proposed establishing a working group outside of the RESP governance process to enable local authority partners to discuss and develop a unified position and agree representatives to nominate to the Regional Energy Strategic Plan (RESP) Board. As identified at the time, this would require dedicated resources.
- 3.4. EEH officers have been in discussions with Oxfordshire County Council's Energy Systems Team to explore the challenges presented by the wider national energy system planning framework led by the National Energy System Operator (NESO) – notably the extensive influence energy has across multiple local authority priorities and the likely dominance of energy system actors on the regional Board.
- 3.5. These discussions have supported the development of a preferred approach to Board representative nominations based on alignment with Spatial Development Strategy boundaries, given the intention to integrate infrastructure, housing and economic growth planning within these.
- 3.6. To enable the local government representatives to operate on behalf of the region, there is a need for a local-authority-owned coordination arrangement to support collective working. This enhances EEH's earlier thinking around a potential working group to provide more enduring support for the duration of the RESP cycle. This would require an agreed funding approach between participating authorities.
- 3.7. EEH has indicated an interest in providing this light-touch coordination role, subject to local authority agreement and the identification of an appropriate funding mechanism.

Suzanne Winkels
Head of Transport Planning
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