



# APSE BIG ENERGY SUMMIT 2026

## BRIEFING NOTE



## What we learned at the APSE Big Energy Summit 2026

The national Local Net Zero Hubs network recently partnered once again with the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) to deliver their annual Big Energy Summit in Birmingham.

The event is designed to showcase best practice ideas for local government clean heat and energy projects, sharing the approaches local authorities are adopting to successfully deliver their local strategies – something also a key objective of the Local Net Zero Hubs.

A key theme of this year's event is that while national policy signals such as the establishment of Great British Energy and the National Wealth Fund, and the publication of the Warm Homes Plan and Local Power Plan are positive, councils must proactively build viable project pipelines and strong governance structures to take advantage of these opportunities.

If you could not attend the event, the Local Net Zero Hubs have rounded up some of the case studies that were highlighted at the event. Slides from presentations given at the event can also be found [here](#).

If you would like the Hubs to connect you to any of these projects, drop us a line at:

- [North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub](#)
- [North West Net Zero Hub](#)
- [Midlands Net Zero Hub](#)
- [South West Net Zero Hub](#)
- [Greater South East Net Zero Hub](#)

### Day 1



Patrick Allcorn, Head of Local Net Zero Delivery and Innovation at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero began the agenda by highlighting the connection between the event and the Local Net Zero Hubs' knowledge transfer activities – **“together we can learn, solve and accelerate”** – and the need for local areas to get the right support, particularly commercial and legal skills for those setting up strategic or commercial partnerships. Patrick reported the emphasis at COP30 on regions and cities, and in particular “reenvisioning places to make them fit for the next century”. Domestically, Patrick set out how the past twelve months have been defined by the establishment of new organisations and structures.

- **NESO**, to drive strategic investment in the energy networks – with Patrick noting the involvement of the Local Net Zero Hubs in engaging with the organisation.

- **National Wealth Fund**, who have allocated £4bn for local net zero and held deep dives with four Mayoral Strategic Authorities.
- **Great British Energy** - including the recent publication of the Local Power Plan. Patrick highlighted that **community energy is “massively important” to the government**, noting the role of the Hubs in developing their local community energy sectors.
- The **Warm Homes Agency**, to follow the Warm Homes Plan.

Patrick highlighted that “money is there” for local projects, but local areas “**need to have a plan and need to have projects**”. **Helen Seagrave, Director of Local Energy for Great British Energy**, introduced the new public energy company, setting out how local energy is one of the organisation’s three priority areas - specifically ensuring how communities benefit from local energy infrastructure either in lower bills or community value.



Helen reported that GBE will launch a Supply Chain Investment Fund later this year to bring manufacturing back to the UK, before introducing the Local Power Plan and its aim to deliver 1000 local and community energy projects through both capital investment and through catalysing self-sustaining business models - with Helen highlighting the role of the Hubs in supporting local projects and collaboration, also promoting GBE’s open Expression of Interest form for potential new projects which can be shared with the relevant Local Net Zero Hub.



**Jack Hayhoe, Head of Net Zero Programmes at the Midlands Net Zero Hub** updated attendees on the activities of the Hubs network over the past 12 months, including the North East and Yorkshire’s securing of funding for energy efficiency improvements for 500 more low income homes (taking the number of homes made warmer and cheaper to power through Hub intervention close to 10,000) and the growth of the North East and Yorkshire community energy sector from 9 organisations in 2019 to over 120 today. During a Question-and-Answer session after the presentations one North East and Yorkshire authority described the Hubs as “really great”.

The first panel of the day was chaired by **Justin Olosunde of the South West Net Zero Hub**, who chairs the cross-Hubs Green Finance Working Group.

Justin updated attendees on the work of the [West of England Investment Readiness Service](#), setting out what is meant by investment readiness

- A Business Case which is clear and credible
- A viable financial model.

- A capable, investor facing- team with a credible track record;
- Strong governance
- A clear Impact Case.

Justin advised attendees to not apply a scatter-gun approach to seeking investment and to instead target specific investors – and again highlighted the necessity of build a strong project pipeline.

**Mark Whitworth of Sheffield City Council** set out how the city is utilising its Local Area Energy Plan to turn its developing energy projects into an investment pipeline by working with the National Wealth Fund. Mark then introduced the authority's **Municipal Bond** offer – with a memorable slogan of **“Don't invest in wacky billionaires, invest in Sheffield”**. The bond offer raised £1m in one month from small (as little as £5) and mostly local investors by offering a return of 4.1%. The money is being used for school solar projects – **“something tangible, that people can see”**. Mark highlighted the importance of political leadership and a well-developed local community energy sector to the project”

**Dominic Brown from York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority** introduced the authority's **Local Net Zero Accelerator** project – managed by the Greater South East Net Zero Hub – seeking to develop the area's Local Area Energy Plan to unlock private investment in clean energy through replicating the Bristol City LEAP, specifically through development of a Strategic Energy Partnership which can:



- Build a pipeline to bring scale.
- Deliver economic modelling to bring certainty
- Co-ordinate a regional approach to bring structure.

Dominic highlighted the value of a strongly data-led to drive prioritisation and confidence and a place-based layer which allows you to **“start where need and opportunity intersect.... That's where communities will feel the benefits”**.

**Karl Rourke of East Riding Council**, set out how under the Department for Transport Live Labs 2 programme the authority has used alternative equipment such as solar powered studs and reflective signage instead of street lighting to deliver road safety statutory obligations, improving nighttime road safety while reducing costs and carbon emissions, supported by an AI modelling system which analyses data from real time road use.

The project will deliver £1.1m of savings over the next 10 years (and up to £6m if rolled out further) and will be 68% cheaper than replacing current infrastructure at end of life while already saving 160 tonnes of CO2. The changes have also led to a 10% decrease in motorcycle speeds which has a “significant baring on survival chances” in the event of a collision.

**Chris Moon, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council**, presented on how to secure internal buy-in for Net Zero activities. The authority has cut emissions by **17,000**

tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> since 2019, with electricity consumption down 47% (the authority's utilities spend would be £2.2m higher at current prices without interventions). The authority has 1800 solar panels across its estate, with 9 refuse vehicles with rooftop solar.

Chris advised attendees to:

- Make arguments based on efficiency, not morality.
- Focus on funding to secure early wins to unlock more internal support.
- Sequence delivery to demonstrate credibility.
- Build blended teams – not just technical specialists but also experts in areas like procurement.
- Weave Net Zero into all aspects of organisational delivery - inductions, cabinet reports and frameworks.

**Jos Holmes from North Yorkshire Council** presented on the authorities working with communities, with a starting point of seeking to embed Net Zero activity on all Directorate Action Plans and cultivating local allies – with the Hubs identified as providing strong support for capacity -building.

Jos advised moving from sporadic engagement to a 'community operating model based around building a network of local allies' to build capacity by:

- Holding community events out of hours to reach more people and focus on 'hard -to -reach' groups.
- Seeking longevity via authentic relationships and being prepared to listen.
- Recognising that community groups need capacity -building support (skills like chairing, treasurer).
- Use storytelling techniques to create engagement.

The afternoon agenda began with a presentation from **Steven Ford of Dorset Council** on the authority's attempts to frame energy strategy around bills, economic development and hyperlocal benefits, **contrasting between climate -impact narratives and local lived experience**,

Steven told councils to be "clear and confident" when it comes to articulating that **67% of energy bills are driven by gas prices, energy costs would be 45% higher if they were not being suppressed by renewables** and the everyday impact – such as potholes -of climate change. Dorset has set out a narrative where local interventions are framed around creating a sustainable modern county – "**local government is well placed to tell the story of Net Zero and localize the benefits**".

**David Trousdale from Newcastle City Council** – where emissions have reduced by 42% since 2005 – introduced the city's AI -supported tool modelling local interventions in the built environment "in a way people with different views on climate or Net Zero can see the benefit of" supporting decision making in a language which is relevant to audience and generating data for business cases.

“Optimism and stubbornness go hand in hand” began a presentation by **Alexandra Snelling-Day, Local Net Zero Accelerator Programme Lead at the Greater South East Net Zero Hub** on funding models. Alexandra began with an overview of the pros and cons of various approaches – “there really is no one magical solution for Net Zero finance” - including

#### **Grant Funding.**

- Reduces borrowing need.
- Good for early-stage or socially important projects.
- Competitive, uncertain, time-limited.
- Risk of “designing to fit the fund.”

#### **Public Works Loan Board Borrowing.**

- Low-cost, long-term.
- Full authority control retained.
- On-balance sheet exposure.
- Not suited to high-risk/innovative projects.

#### **Concession Model - Private partner finances, builds, operates.**

- Transfers financing and delivery risk.
- Reduces public borrowing.
- Long-term inflexibility risk.
- Potential misalignment with public outcomes.

#### **Project Finance (generally through a Special Purpose Vehicle)**

- Off-balance sheet potential.
- Risk sits in project company.
- Attractive to specialist lenders.
- Complex structuring.
- Requires stable revenue streams.

#### **Blended Finance - A mix of grants, debt, equity.**

- Reduces risk per investor.
- Makes marginal projects viable.
- Higher transaction costs and coordination complexity.

Alexandra argued that local authorities need to **move from “grant reliance” to “investment readiness” as “grants won’t scale Net Zero delivery”**, arguing that that authority’s priorities should be enabling system level investment rather than small and standalone projects. – **“Investment ready portfolios can unlock finance faster”**

## **Day 2**

The second day of the event began with a series of short case studies of successful local projects, including **Shaun Bennett from Derby Homes** presenting on the organisation’s work **decarbonising hard-to-treat non-traditional properties**, specifically 1920s Cast Iron Homes (an early example of modular housing!)

specifically designed to be rodent proof. The work, supported by the Midlands Net Zero Hub, has had customer engagement at its core – leading to a refusal rate of just one property.

**Dani Jackson, Tees Valley Regional Project Manager for the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub**, presented on the Hub's work **derisking local authority investments in solar canopies in publicly owned car parks through a data-driven portfolio-based approach**. The Hub has developed an excel toolkit – to be launched shortly – which delivers outputs such as feasibility ranking, generation and local supply potential, carbon impact assessment, financial viability and site constraints

**Harry Baross, Hull and East Yorkshire Regional Project Manager for the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub** presented the findings from a recent review of regional Net Zero careers advice, and how local authorities need a supply chain to match their ambition when it comes to clean heat and energy. The review – to be published shortly – sets out what good Net Zero careers support looks like:



- Employer involvement at every stage
- Clear pathways into employment or further training
- Realistic hands-on experience
- Local labour market alignment

This was followed by **Mark Ducker presenting on Walsall Council's Sustainable Education Programme: 'Achieve Your Goals'**, which has sought to combine delivery of 60 energy efficient schools with the engagement of 7000 families through interactive curriculum -linked lessons; games and podcasts.

**Poppy Maltby from Regen** presented on learning from UKRIs Net Zero Living Programme of local authority pilots tackling non-technical barriers to Net Zero. The programme has been supported throughout by the Hubs network. The now completed two-year programme has made a number of key learnings.

- Local authorities must evidence the health, economic, and social benefits if they want to unlock internal support and investment in retrofit – and Cardiff Council's work in this area showed that **every £1 spent on retrofit delivered £5 of health and economic benefits**.
- Clear, locally-relevant guidance and engagement with communities will help accelerate retrofit.
- Increasing demand for retrofit can only be met if councils convene partners and invest in local skills to build local supply chains

- Local energy projects that start with lived experience and co-design with local communities tend to be more successful. Trusted local intermediaries and peer-to-peer forums are also important.
- Community energy becomes more scalable when councils act as enablers by convening partners and supporting at early stages.
- The important of project pipeline development – “the missing gap between planning and finance” – was reiterated, with the message “Local authorities should consider which tools, partnerships, and business cases can help their ideas become investor-ready”

Gareth Harcome delivered a presentation on the **Cardiff Heat Network**, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the council which has taken advantage of a Welsh government policy of reducing use of landfill sites to deliver a local heat network – **with 80% less carbon emissions than traditional gas systems** – connected to a new build Energy from Waste facility. The network signed up local public sector sites as off-takers – including the Senedd and the iconic Millenium Centre – to minimise risk to the project. Gareth outlined that the entire process has taken close to a decade – and encountered major obstacles – but highlighted that only 10% of overall heat capacity is being used currently, allowing for major expansion particularly through interface with other major local infrastructure projects.

Hayley Ash from the **South West Net Zero Hub** convened a session on the opportunity and benefits of partnership working between local authorities and community energy groups. The session included presentations from **Helen Martin from Bristol Energy Cooperative**, **Sara Grimes from Bath and West Community Energy**, and **Ellena Bryant from Bath and North East Somerset Council**. Local Authorities and Community Energy Groups have different but complimentary strengths, and by working together they can achieve strong delivery, with a greater local impact.

**South Ayrshire Council** presented on their use of Building Management System optimisation in the decarbonisation of their own estate – **with £350,000 of investment in the installation of 130 sites leading to savings of £750,000** and over 3000 tonnes of carbon emissions.

**Andrew Glassford, from Preston City Council** and **John Mullins from the North West Net Zero Hub** delivered the workshop “**Crematorium Decarbonisation: A Burning Issue for Local Authorities**” which set out the main technological routes to reduce emissions from crematoria, which are often the highest-carbon assets in local authority estates. Drawing on findings from the **North West Net Zero Hub’s 2025** assessment of Preston’s cremator replacement options, the session highlighted that **full electrification is currently the only assured pathway to net zero, offering significantly lower energy consumption and operational costs than gas or hybrid systems**, though requiring higher up front capital costs and enabling works such as electrical upgrades and building modifications. Hybrid technologies, combining gas and electric heating, are currently under technical trials and performance data from these systems will be available during this year.

Delegates were encouraged to **plan early, typically over a five-year horizon, to align capital investment, infrastructure upgrades and operational changes.**



**Involve** delivered a workshop on best practice in Community Engagement, highlighting how “**place is a more effective basis for engagement...** What do you love about your place” than Net Zero or climate as these topics have “little salience” – **engagement must be connected to the everyday lives of residents.** These themes will be developed further through government commissioned engagement training to be delivered by

Involve through the Local Net Zero Hubs.

**Ella Sanders (North West Net Zero Hub) and Thiru Annamalai (Midlands Net Zero Hub),** who are both part of the programme of **Heat Network Zoning support hosted by the Net Zero Hubs,** updated attendees on the progress of Heat Network Zoning, and where it fits with the Warm Homes Plan objective for 7% of heat demand in England to be met by heat networks by 2035 through local identification and designation of areas where heat networks would provide the lowest cost heat decarbonisation option alongside a requirement that certain buildings in the zone connect to a network within it. The update included details about how the Heat Network Zoning Authority, who will oversee the delivery of zoning, including identifying and designating zones, plan to build a pipeline of zones expected to be designated in the next five years

**Dr Sandra Bögelein from the Climate Change Committee** completed the agenda with a presentation on emerging findings from the Seventh Carbon Budget, noting that demand could be more than double by 2050, with recommendations such as:

- Develop a Local Area Energy Plan and contribute to Regional Energy Systems Planning, informed by community engagement.
- Consider renewable energy generation on council owned land (for example, land, landfill sites or council-owned roofs).
- Purchase power from clean sources and consider Power Purchase Agreements, to support investment in new renewables.
- Where appropriate, participate in the innovation space around smart local grids, flexibility and load shifting.
- Build planning capacity to assess renewable energy generation applications.

Sandra also stated that “switching to low-carbon heating systems is the most impactful measure to decarbonise existing homes” and recommended authorities

- Develop a plan to fully decarbonise council homes.

- Where viable, support the development of a heat network.
- Support engagement of the public and landlords with low carbon heating systems.
- Support the development of a local supply chain for low carbon heating systems.
- Identify and engage with households who are eligible for government support