

Sussex is entering a pivotal moment in its devolution journey. The emerging Sussex & Brighton Combined County Authority (SBCCA) will take on significant responsibilities for growth, transport, housing, planning, skills, health and regeneration. Clean, affordable and secure energy underpins each of these functions and delivers critical co-benefits across them.

This briefing sets out practical early actions and longer-term opportunities for the emerging SBCCA to embed energy and climate across its functions, maximise co-benefits, and position Sussex for inclusive growth, resilience and investment. *Note: Climate change adaptation and nature recovery are important considerations but are not covered in this briefing.*

Energy and climate action are not stand-alone policy areas; they are central enablers of the SBCCA's entire agenda. Investment in clean energy and decarbonisation reduces costs for households, businesses and public services; improves housing quality; shapes transport systems; supports productivity and competitiveness; improves air quality and health outcomes; strengthens energy security; and creates demand for skilled local jobs. Embedding energy considerations across all areas of competence early helps maximise co-benefits and avoid costly retrofitting of policy decisions later.

Investing in net zero is also a major economic opportunity. Nationally, the transition to a low-carbon economy is expected to support hundreds of thousands of jobs and deliver substantial economic growth over the coming decades¹. The UK's net zero economy is already growing around three times faster than the economy as a whole², highlighting clean energy and low-carbon sectors as one of the strongest drivers of future growth, jobs and investment. Locally, activity such as home retrofit, renewable energy deployment and electric vehicle infrastructure directly creates skilled employment, strengthens local supply chains, attracts private investment and reduces energy costs for households and businesses. Sussex is well placed to capture these benefits, with strong natural assets, including high solar potential, and a growing clean-energy economy.

A strong local example is the University of Brighton's Clean Growth UK programme, which has helped SMEs secure over £2 million in R&D funding, supported the creation of more than 300 green jobs and enabled the development of new low-carbon products³. This illustrates how coordinated action on energy and climate can deliver innovation, productivity and local prosperity alongside emissions reduction.

Sussex starts from a position of strength. All upper-tier authorities have robust climate strategies, measurable carbon-reduction commitments and ongoing investment programmes, supported by Sussex Energy — a region-wide partnership that already brings together energy system leads from all three upper-tier authorities, alongside universities, NHS Sussex, business groups, a strong and experienced community energy sector and the Greater South East Net Zero Hub. Sussex also benefits from favourable natural and economic conditions, including high solar potential, exposure to onshore and offshore wind, and an engaged, relatively affluent population capable of supporting local investment and participation in renewable energy. Together, this provides a ready-made forum for cross-authority coordination on energy policy, evidence and delivery that does not otherwise exist at a Sussex-wide level and offers a strong foundation for a more coordinated and investable regional energy proposition – enabling the SBCCA to maximise local value retention as it takes on takes on strategic responsibilities for growth, infrastructure, skills and regeneration.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-strategy>

¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/local-green-jobs-accelerating-sustainable-economic-recovery>

² [https://www.renewableinstitute.org/uk-netzero-sector-growing-faster-than-economy](https://www.renewableinstitute.org/uk-net-zero-sector-growing-faster-than-economy)

³ <https://www.clean-growth.uk/south-east-hub/>

Early priorities for the first 1-2 years focus on practical, achievable actions that will set the SBCCA up for long-term success:

Governance, Capacity & Transition Management: The transition to the SBCCA, alongside potential local government reorganisation, risks loss of momentum unless ownership and coordination are clear. Proportionate governance and temporary coordination arrangements will maintain continuity, avoid duplication and embed climate and energy across all SBCCA functions from the outset, enabling early identification of co-benefits across energy, transport, skills and regeneration.

- Ensuring continuity and capacity during transition, with risk assessment and interim coordination arrangements.
- Embedding climate and environment across all SBCCA functions, strategies and decision-making.
- Ensuring inclusive governance so that non-voting but critical stakeholders including local authority energy leads, are embedded from the outset.

Evidence, Strategy & Spatial Planning: Strategic energy decisions require a shared evidence base. A Sussex-wide Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP), aligned with spatial planning, will inform infrastructure investment, engagement with government and regulators, and prioritisation of interventions that best support growth, resilience and net zero.

- Commissioning a Sussex-wide LAEP to support the Spatial Development Strategy and infrastructure investment.
- Demonstrating regional leadership on the energy transition with other emerging South East Mayoral Strategic Authorities, highlighting Sussex's skills, delivery capability and leadership to attract investment and open up wider opportunities with central government/national partners.

Investment, Funding & Market Shaping: The SBCCA's role is to shape markets and crowd in investment. Clear investment frameworks, early funding mechanisms and alignment with national policy (e.g. Warm Homes Plan, Local Power Plan, Great British Energy, NESO's RESP) will reduce delivery risk and position Sussex to respond quickly to funding opportunities.

- Leveraging government policy to maximise funding opportunities and ensure strategic readiness, including engagement with NESO.
- Creating a regional investment framework for energy and green infrastructure.
- Launching early funding mechanisms such as development grants, SME loan schemes and targeted capital support.

Programme Delivery & Infrastructure Deployment: Early delivery builds credibility. Accelerating priority programmes such as heat networks and solar deployment will deliver carbon savings, reduce costs, support local supply chains and create investable pipelines within a mayoral term.

- Designating priority heat network zones to accelerate heat decarbonisation.
- Accelerating solar deployment through Solar Across Sussex and exploration of future support for group purchasing schemes such as Solar Together Sussex.

Skills, Partnerships & Place-Based Growth: Delivery depends on skills and partnerships. Aligning net-zero skills with the LSIP and FE/HE providers, alongside national positioning, will support delivery at scale and attract investment and high-quality jobs.

- Strengthening net-zero skills pathways aligned with the LSIP and FE/HE providers.
- Positioning Sussex nationally by leveraging strong local capabilities in solar, hydrogen transport, heat networks and community energy.

Longer-term opportunities (3-10 years) should reflect the approaches used by established combined authorities that have made progress by moving beyond individual projects to a sustained strategic role in planning, delivery, market shaping, skills, and investment. Based on a high-level extrapolation of the Brighton & Hove Decarbonisation Pathway Report, scaled by population, it is estimated that Sussex & Brighton may require c. £21.7 billion of investment to reach net zero (indicative only) and could support c. 24,000 jobs in the net zero economy, based on population-scaled national estimates⁴. A structured review of comparable combined authorities should therefore form part of SBCCA's medium-term workplan assessing which interventions are transferable to Sussex, and how SBCCA powers can be used most effectively. Areas to consider include:

Strategic Energy System Planning. E.g.

- Developing whole-system regional energy strategies and pathways, including LAEP coordination.
- Building relationships with DNOs, NESO and Ofgem to influence grid investment and connections.

Major Programme Delivery. E.g.

- Large-scale retrofit and heat decarbonisation programmes for homes and public buildings.
- Regional heat network development, including zoning and delivery agencies.
- Expansion of solar deployment, battery storage and smart systems.

Market-Shaping and Innovation. E.g.

- Demand aggregation and regional procurement frameworks (e.g. heat pumps, solar, retrofit).
- Use public land and assets to unlock renewable and storage projects and support innovation testbeds.

Convening and Governance. E.g.

- Establishing strong regional energy governance bringing together local authorities, universities, NHS, DNOs, business networks and community energy organisations as a single point of engagement for government, investors and regulators.
- Ensuring energy and net zero are fully integrated into all SBCCA statutory functions (growth, skills, transport, spatial planning).

Skills and Workforce. E.g.

- Establish regional net-zero skills academies and retrofit, heat pump, solar, green construction and hydrogen training programmes.
- Alignment with the Local Skills Improvement Plan and local FE/HE providers.

Long-Term Funding and Investment Mechanisms. E.g.

- Green investment, retrofit and heat funds; low-cost and revolving loan models; community and municipal energy investment; and strategic investment partnerships using blended finance. Sussex Energy is commissioning a regional funding and investment strategy to benchmark best practice, map funding and investor opportunities and inform future SBCCA decisions.

Together, these priorities enable SBCCA to shift from isolated projects to a **coherent, multi-year regional energy programme** that supports economic growth, strengthens energy resilience, reduces costs for residents and businesses, and secures long-term investment into Sussex.

⁴ [https://eciu.net/media/press-releases/2025/uk-netzero-economy-grows-10-in-a-year-finds-new-report](https://eciu.net/media/press-releases/2025/uk-net-zero-economy-grows-10-in-a-year-finds-new-report)