

**BRIGHTON AND HOVE CITY COUNCIL
GREATER BRIGHTON ECONOMIC BOARD
24.06.2026
MINUTES**

Attendees:

Councillors: Caroline Baxter (Chair), Martin Lury, Rob Eggleston, Bella Sankey, Jeremy Gardner,

Officers and business partners:

Dr Douglas Gregg, Abigail Dombey, Andrew Swayne, Debbie Keeling, Joanna Hayward, Karl Roberts, Judy Holmes, Jess Gibbons, Ian Duke, Michael Jones, Andy Hill, Natasha Bridge, Steve Skelton, Natasha Bridge, Francis Mitchell, Matt Nixon, Bruno D'Orta, Rachel Harding, Aadarsha Dhakal, Damien Towe,

Press:

Sarah Booker-Lewis

1 – Ratification of Chair

1.1 Paul Brewer introduced this item and confirmed that Cllr Caroline Baxter was to be the chair of the Greater Brighton Economic Board.

2 – Procedural Business

2.1 Caroline Baxter (Chair) introduced this item.

2.2 There were no declarations of interests.

2.3 There were no exclusions of the press and public.

3 – Minutes of the previous meeting

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as correct record.

4 – Chair’s Comms

4.1 The Chair delivered the following comms:

Good morning everyone, and welcome to today's meeting. Thank you to Ricardo for hosting us.

Before turning to the agenda, I would like to acknowledge our thanks to Cllr Sankey for her leadership and commitment as Chair, and for the energy and dedication she has brought to driving the work of Greater Brighton and fostering the strong culture of partnership that has characterised this Board during her time in the role.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Bruno D'Orta from the University of Sussex, who has joined us for six weeks to support Sussex Energy communications. We are very pleased to have Bruno on board. I would also like to thank Aadarsha Dhakal, a Masters student from the University of Brighton, who has developed a map of decarbonisation projects in Sussex as part of Sussex Energy and has joined us today to present this work.

Since we last met, an important milestone has been reached in the devolution journey. Following its formal establishment in March, the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority held its inaugural meeting in April, which I had the honour of attending, beginning the process of putting in place the governance and foundations needed to deliver on its early priorities. This marks the transition from planning for devolution to putting it into practice, and we look forward to continuing to work closely with colleagues as the new Authority develops.

The county council elections in May have also brought change to the Strategic Authority itself, with a number of new members joining the Strategic Authority Board. The Authority will hold its first Annual General Meeting on 1 July in Crawley, which will be the first meeting of the Board since those elections. Alongside welcoming new members and beginning their induction programme, the meeting will also provide an opportunity to celebrate the Authority's formal establishment and to launch the framework for its Prosperity Strategy.

I am also pleased that we have Steve Skelton from the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority with us today. Steve will be able to say more about the plans for developing the Prosperity Strategy and how the transition of Greater Brighton Economic Board work is being positioned within that wider strategic framework.

The wider national picture also continues to reinforce the importance of the work taking place across Sussex. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill has now received Royal Assent, providing a clearer framework for strategic authorities across England and further underlining the opportunities available to our region.

Turning to Sussex Energy, it is encouraging to see continued momentum. The Solar Site Identification and Prioritisation work is now underway, helping to develop a

pipeline of investable projects across Sussex, and I would like to thank the consultants supporting this work, Abigail Dombey, Graeme Maclean and Doug Gregg, for joining us today. We look forward to hearing their update and learning more about the progress being made. Nationally, Government has announced a further package of measures to accelerate clean, homegrown energy, including support for rooftop and plug-in solar, heat pumps, grid reform and retrofit, all closely aligned with the ambitions of the Sussex Energy mission.

It has also been encouraging to receive a positive response from Great British Energy to the Board's letter supporting Sussex's Community Energy proposal. Their response recognised the leadership being shown across Sussex and highlighted the importance of regional collaboration in turning strong pipelines into investable and deliverable projects.

Skills and workforce development are equally important. I am pleased to see the launch next month of the new Vaillant Centre of Excellence at Brighton MET College – the first facility of its kind in the UK – which will help equip the workforce needed to support the transition to low-carbon heating. This is another example of the strengths that exist across our colleges, universities and businesses when working together.

More broadly, it has been encouraging to see partners across Sussex working together to attract investment and raise the profile of the region. In June, Gatwick Airport led a delegation to UKREiiF, the UK's leading forum for real estate development and investment, with Mid Sussex District Council, Crawley Borough Council, Brighton & Hove City Council and the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority among those taking part. With more than 17,000 delegates in attendance, including councils, businesses and almost every Mayoral Authority, the event provided an important opportunity to showcase Sussex and strengthen relationships with investors and partners. The Gatwick Airport Enterprise Zone provided an effective platform for this year's presence and demonstrated the benefits of partners working together to promote the region and its opportunities.

Finally, it is pleasing to see that the newly established Strategic Authority has already demonstrated the value of regional collaboration through the submission of a Sussex-wide Expression of Interest for heat networks. Adur and Worthing, Brighton & Hove, Lewes & Eastbourne and Crawley councils all submitted expressions of interest that referenced and complemented one another, alongside the Strategic Authority's submission. Building on the experience of successful schemes in Worthing and Crawley, these coordinated submissions demonstrate a strong level of joined-up working and a shared commitment to driving the energy transition, and the Sussex Energy mission, across different geographies in the region. It is an early but encouraging example of how the Strategic Authority and partners across Sussex are aligning around shared priorities and translating strategic ambitions into practical opportunities for investment and delivery.

With that context, I will now turn to the agenda and provide a short introduction to each of the papers before us today.

Agenda for today

Sussex Energy Update

The first paper and following two presentations provide an update on the continued progress of Sussex Energy and the work underway to strengthen the region's project pipeline, attract investment and support the transition of the programme into the Strategic Authority. Members are asked to note progress and support the next phase of Solar Across Sussex and the Regional Energy Finance Strategy, both of which will help position Sussex as a practical and investable clean energy region.

Annual Report

The next paper presents the Greater Brighton Economic Board Annual Report for 2025/26, highlighting another year of partnership working and delivery across the city region. Given the Board's transition into the Strategic Authority era, a lighter report has been prepared this year, with a more comprehensive final report planned for the Board's concluding meeting. Members are asked to approve the report and share it with their respective organisations.

Transition and Dissolution Pathway

The final paper concerns the transition and eventual dissolution of the Greater Brighton Economic Board. As members will recall, we have always been clear that the Board's role is to support an orderly transition into the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority, ensuring that the value, partnerships and momentum built up over more than a decade are not lost. This paper therefore asks members to consider the progress made to date and whether sufficient confidence exists regarding the future positioning and continuity of key initiatives, particularly Sussex Energy, before determining the most appropriate timing for completing the transition to the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority.

5 – Sussex Energy Update

5.1 Natasha Bridge introduced this item and delivered the report.

5.2 The board agreed the recommendations of the report.

6 – Sussex Energy Map

6.1 Natasha Bridge and Aadarsha Dhakal presented a showcase of the Sussex Energy Map.

6.2 There were no questions.

7 – Solar Across Sussex

7.1 Abigail Dombey and Graeme Maclean presented this item.

7.2 Abigail Dombey provided an overview of Sussex Energy and its goals.

7.3 Abigail Dombey provided an overview of solar energy distribution across the UK and stated the intent to remove early-stage uncertainty and friction that delays solar projects.

7.4 Abigail Dombey provided an overview of the stakeholders that were engaged and provided an overview of common issues such as lack of capacity, planning uncertainty, and lack of inclusion of solar land requirements in Local Plans.

7.5 Graeme Maclean presented a map of solar suitability in Sussex and provided an overview of the amount of energy that could be produced within the county.

7.6 Cllr Robert Eggleston was provided with more detail regarding solar capacity in the county.

7.7 Abigail Dombey stated that Sussex has less solar than other counties.

7.8 Graeme Maclean stated that the Sussex Downs AONB was a limiting factor in the number of solar facilities that could be installed.

7.9 Graeme Maclean stated the importance of solar being included in the Local Plans of authorities to ensure installation space is available.

7.10 Bella Sankey commended the report and questioned what additional assumptions the energy report contained.

7.11 Michael Jones stated their support in maximising opportunities for rooftop solar and questioned what further barriers or obstacles may prevent solar development in the county.

7.12 Graeme Maclean stated that the next stage of the project was to look at solar suitable areas in more detail to determine whether they are already earmarked for development.

7.13 Jeremy Gardener stated the importance of the project and its benefits being adequately communicated and advertised.

7.14 Graeme Maclean stated that locally produced electricity was cheaper than nationally sourced alternatives.

8 – Greater Brighton Annual Report 2025/26

8.1 Andy Hill introduced this item and delivered the report.

8.2 There were no questions.

8.3 The board agreed the recommendations of the report.

9 – Presentation from SBSA

9.1 Steve Skelton presented the report for this item, stating that the SBSA was created to unlock long-term devolved funding and give Sussex a single strategic voice at the national level.

9.2 Steve Skelton stated that the authority would receive £1.14 billion in long-term investment funding for over 30 years.

9.3 Steve Skelton provided an overview of how investment funds would be utilized.

9.4 Andrew Swayne commended the report and stated that the A27 west of Shoreham had been let down by successive governments and questioned how the SBSA would remedy transport issues in the county.

9.5 Andrew Swayne stated that the success of devolution depended on new transport infrastructure.

9.6 Steve Skelton stated that the SBSA would be strengthened in future years as a result of devolution and regulatory opportunities.

9.7 Steve Skelton stated that the SBSA would be the transport authority for the county.

9.8 Debbie Keeling questioned the role of private investment in the SBSA and was informed of examples in other authorities such as the Greater

Manchester Housing Fund.

10 – Transition and Dissolution Pathway

- 10.1 Andy Hill presented this item.
- 10.2 Andrew Swayne stated that the recommendation was pragmatic.
- 10.3 Michael Jones stated the importance of not rushing the dissolution of the board.
- 10.4 The Chair stated their support of the recommendations of the report.
- 10.5 The board agreed the recommendations of the report.

The meeting concluded at 11:52.

