REGEN

Greater South East Net Zero Hub

EXTRACT
Preparing for RESP: Insights into the local governance landscape across the Greater South East

September 2026 – Final

About Greater South East Net Zero Hub

The Greater South East Net Zero Hub is a regional, government-funded initiative that works with local authorities, other public sector organisations, and their stakeholders to support the development and financing of local energy projects.

About Regen

Regen provides independent, evidence-led insight and advice in support of our mission to transform the UK's energy system for a net zero future. We focus on analysing the systemic challenges of decarbonising power, heat and transport. We know that a transformation of this scale will require engaging the whole of society in a just transition.

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Our aims and approach

The development of Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESP) by the National Energy System Operator (NESO) represents a step change in the planning and delivery of the UK's energy system. For local authorities, RESPs offer a more structured and evidence-driven route to proactively steer future investment in electricity, gas and heat infrastructure towards regional priorities. Across the Greater South East, four RESPs will be produced.

This research explores how local authorities across the Greater South East anticipate engaging with RESP, how current governance structures might help or hinder this, and how arrangements could evolve in the context of potential Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution.

Seven interviews were held with officers from various types of authority affected differently by potential LGR and devolution. The engagement generated a rich picture of the ambitions and challenges unique to each council, as of August 2026, presented in this report as case studies by RESP region.

The case studies should be seen as a snapshot of plans, before the government announced a review of LGR and the nomination process opened for the RESP Strategic Boards and Working Groups. As the plans had not been formally agreed by the local authorities at the time of the interviews, this report aims to inform GSENZH. It is accompanied by a summary presentation which is intended for a broader audience.

Approaches vary widely within and across the RESP regions

[Confidential regional summaries]

Consensus emerged across the regions on some topics

Among all interviewees, there was strong agreement that energy is increasingly viewed as a growth and spatial planning issue, rather than primarily a climate change issue.

Most are seeking to use or adapt existing governance structures to support evidence gathering and decision making. To augment the NESO governance groups, several recognised the need for council-led, region-level governance processes to meet the demands of RESP, yet few such forums currently exist outside Greater London.

There is widespread confusion around NESO's expectations regarding data and evidence. LAEPs are seen as a useful foundation but it is not yet clear how they may be used in practice, especially as their quality varies and they may not align with future council boundaries. Many are also frustrated by what they see as NESO's lack of transparency, which is perceived as undermining local authorities' ability to prepare when capacity is widely constrained.

Significant areas of divergence surfaced

As highlighted through the regional summaries, readiness to engage with RESP varies widely among authorities, in terms of their capacity and thinking about evolving governance structures and nominations. Political complexities and boundary uncertainties are particularly acute in two regions, and only some areas can draw on the support and resources of established or emerging strategic authorities.

The councils interviewed vary widely in how they think a regional mandate should be secured, and how advanced their discussions are about collaborating as a region to more effectively influence RESP outcomes in a credible and coherent way. Based on the interviews, only one region is actively coordinating nominations for working groups and considering future issues regarding how officers will support the Strategic Board representatives throughout the process.

Possible roles for the GSENZH

Regen has identified a range of ways that the Greater South East Net Zero Hub (GSENZH) could, subject to discussions with DESNZ, support local authorities to complement NESO forthcoming Local Actor Support.

1. **Disseminate key updates** on NESO's methodology, governance and nomination processes through concise briefings or targeted one-to-one discussions.
2. **Build a more comprehensive view** by continuing to engage with local authorities, especially those under-represented in this research, such as existing unitaries, emerging Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) and districts.
3. **Host best-practice discussions** on governance challenges, bringing together different groupings of authorities, such as councils within each region or emerging MSAs to facilitate cross-regional knowledge exchange.
4. **Advocate for greater clarity from NESO** on data and evidence gathering, the relationships between the Strategic Boards and Working Groups.
5. **Raise awareness among the NESO team of the complexities facing local government**, including the impact of potential LGR and devolution, and the importance of strategic board representatives securing a credible regional mandate.
6. **Explore how SDS could support RESP**, filling a gap in government guidance.
7. **Develop understanding of DNO business planning processes** among Strategic Board representatives and lead officers, as this is how RESP will be implemented within the framework of current regulations.
8. **Develop practical resources**, such as templates and toolkits on managing datasets across local authorities, terms of reference or sample briefings.
9. **Champion stronger regional collaboration**, working with each region to identify a suitable route to help build consensus and more effectively influence RESP outcomes.

Developing more detailed governance processes

This research has focused on the formation of governance groups and initial plans for evidence gathering and potential regional coordination.

As RESPs develop, local authorities will also need more detailed processes to underpin their input to shape key energy infrastructure decisions. A range of success criteria (e.g. efficient data collation, strength of mandate) could be developed. These could be discussed with relevant officers to help strengthen their plans as they progress, rather than being undertaken as a theoretical exercise.

Further thought could also be given to the anticipated governance challenges likely to emerge through 2027, such as transparently managing conflicting perspectives, and preparing for how they will appraise the RESP plans and reach a voting position in 2028.

Contents

Section 1: Introduction 1
Section 2: Context 4
Sections 3 to 6: Confidential regional summaries 10
Section 7: Cross-regional themes 11
Section 8: Possible roles for the GSENZH 14

Glossary

Acronym	Definition
CPCA	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
DESNZ	Department of Energy Security and Net Zero
DFES	Distribution Future Energy Scenarios
DNO	Distribution Network Operator
FSA	Foundational Strategic Authority
GLA	Greater London Authority
GSENZH	Greater South East Net Zero Hub
LA	Local Authority
LAEP	Local Area Energy Plan
LGR	Local Government Reorganisation
MSA	Mayoral Strategic Authority
NESO	National Energy System Operator
Ofgem	Office of Gas and Electricity Markets
OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
RAB	Regional Advisory Board
RESP	Regional Energy Strategic Plan
SA	Strategic Authority
SBSA	Sussex and Brighton Strategic Authority
SCC	Surrey County Council
SDS	Spatial Development Strategy
SSEP	Strategic Spatial Energy Plan
UKPN	UK Power Networks
WSCC	West Sussex County Council

Section 1:

Introduction

The research aims and approach

The development of Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESP) by the National Energy System Operator (NESO) represents a step change in the planning and delivery of the UK's energy system. RESPs will introduce a new formal model of regional energy planning that emphasises the role of places and people in shaping infrastructure decisions that support economic growth and decarbonisation.

Across Great Britain, 11 RESPs will be produced by the end of 2028. For local authorities, RESPs offer a more structured and evidence-driven route to proactively steer future investment in electricity, gas and heat infrastructure towards regional priorities, building on the engagement currently undertaken by distribution network operators (DNOs).

This is an important opportunity for local places to ensure infrastructure planning aligns with their growth ambitions. NESO have set out a proposed governance model for local authorities to engage. However, the ability of local authorities to fully engage in the process and effectively influence RESP outcomes is uncertain.

Barriers include the lack of a statutory duty and funding to undertake energy planning, resulting in highly varied capacity and technical expertise across councils. Some councils also have developed more comprehensive and granular evidence bases than others, and benefit from stronger political support to undertake energy planning. Decision-making processes within councils and partnerships to enable coordination within regions are also fragmented.

This research explores how local authorities across the Greater South East anticipate engaging with RESP. It also assesses how local authorities could be better supported to provide the clearly articulated, evidence-based, coordinated insight likely to be most influential in securing local government priorities through RESP.

It complements previous work undertaken by the Net Zero Hubs to support local authorities with local and regional energy planning. This includes guidance and an e-learning course, 'Ready for RESP' (available at Net Zero Go or GSENZH) and the National Energy and Environment Data Specification (NEEDS), which aims to reduce the complexity and cost of deploying digital planning in local area energy plans.

1.1. **Research aims**

The aims of this research are to:

- Build a richer picture of the current governance landscape related to energy planning within and between local authorities in each RESP region.
- Assess how governance structures might help or hinder interaction with RESP.
- Explore how local authority governance structures could evolve in future, especially in the context of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution.

Evaluating emerging approaches across regions or defining possible governance archetypes are not within the scope of this initial exploration. However, the information gathered could provide the basis for further analysis and collaboration with each region to strengthen their planned approaches. Next steps to build on this research and potential ways the GSENZH could support authorities are set out in Section 8.

1.2. **Approach**

Across the Greater South East, four RESPs will be produced (Central England, East, Greater London and South East), as shown in Figure 1.

This research is grounded in engagement with local authorities across the Greater South East, with the analysis structured by RESP region.

Seven semi-structured interviews were held with council officers involved in strategic energy planning, drawing on the relationships established by the GSENZH. This research method generated a rich picture of the current landscape, enabling exploration of the underlying drivers and constraints unique to each council, as well as enabling the candid sharing of personal opinions.

Figure 1 Map of RESP regions, showing the four GSE and neighbouring RESP regions. Source: NESO, 2025

Councils were selected from each RESP region to provide a representative sample of various types of local authority (e.g. county, unitary, combined authority) who may be affected differently by potential LGR and devolution. Five variations were identified for how local government may be re-structured if LGR and devolution continue, shown in Table 1.

More interviews were held in regions with more complex and changing political structures. Due to time constraints, no district councils were interviewed as they are less likely to be leading engagement with NESO on strategic energy planning.

Table 1 Selection of interviewees reflecting how they may be affected by LGR (as of August 2026) and devolution

Variant	Local authorities interviewed
Established unitary authorities, with established Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs)	[Removed as confidential]
Established unitaries and early stage discussions on MSAs	
New unitaries following LGR, with an established MSA	
New unitaries following LGR, with emerging MSA (devolution priority programme)	
New unitaries following LGR, with early-stage discussions on MSAs	

While some common themes can be drawn, the circumstances of each council are distinctive, and, therefore, the findings in this report are presented as case studies by region, with cross-regional themes and recommendations for the GSENZH. Interviewees were not expected to share a collective or representative view across their region, and those interviewed are likely to be more advanced in their thinking than some others in their region.

This report should be treated as confidential to the GSENZH. We have produced a separate summary (as a slide pack for an online event) of findings and recommendations suitable for publication, which anonymises local authority contributions.

An accompanying report has also been produced summarising the findings from geospatial analysis of local authority boundaries, at present and following potential LGR, proposed devolution and Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) geographies.

The research was undertaken before the Government's announcement in September 2026 about the review of LGR. Wording in the final version of the report has been updated to reflect the fresh uncertainties, but the interview findings and maps reflect the situation as of August 2026. Where possible, updates on local authority plans and policy positions received after the interviews have been incorporated and clearly indicated; this research should be seen as a snapshot at a time of rapid change.

Section 2: Context

A summary of the proposed RESP governance model and major structural changes affecting local government across England

2.1. Proposed governance external model for the RESPs

In the RESP draft methodology for consultation published in November 2025, NESO proposed a multi-level, collaborative governance structure designed to align national energy objectives with regional delivery and local insight, shown in Figure 2.

The outcome of the consultation has been delayed from summer 2026 (following the Secretary of State sign off) and therefore these proposals are subject to change as NESO refines the model in response to stakeholder feedback. In September, NESO published additional guidance for those looking to participate in the RESP governance groups.

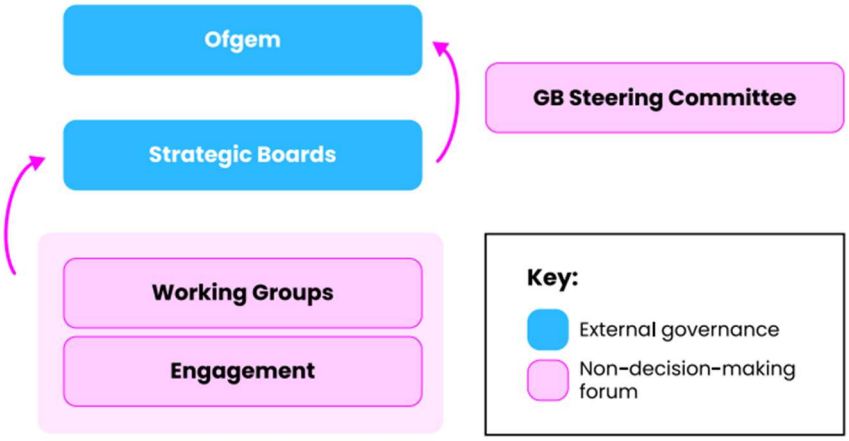

Figure 2 Proposed RESP Governance Structure. Source: NESO. 2025

The proposed RESP governance model is intended to be nationally consistent but locally informed, with strong cross-sector integration and a clear emphasis on collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and practical delivery.

NESO proposed a GB Steering Committee to provide overarching coordination by setting the methodology, data standards and strategic direction to ensure consistency across all regions, and coordination with GB-wide plans, such as the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP) and Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP).

Some local authorities have also been asked to engage with the development of the CSNP, which will inform investment planning for the transmission network, and most local authorities already engage with annual Distribution Future Energy Scenarios processes to inform DNO investment plans for the distribution networks.

2.1.1. Strategic Boards

At the regional level, it is proposed that RESP would be delivered through Strategic Boards, one in each of the proposed RESP regions, designed to provide strategic oversight and direction for that region. Members will be drawn from DNOs, gas distribution networks, local government, and several cross-sector bodies (e.g. industry, transport, consumer groups).

The latest guidance describes the role of the Strategic Board as providing strategic direction, considering the main choices and trade-offs and helping ensure the plan reflects local priorities while aligning with national goals.

The proposed scope of the Strategic Boards (see draft Terms of Reference in the draft methodology) is to:

- discuss and make recommendations on strategic questions and design decisions (based on options provided)
- review and provide feedback on interim RESP components as they are developed by the RESP team
- review and approve formal change requests pertaining to the scope, deliverables, and milestones
- review and approve the RESPs for final sign-off.

Drawing on NESO's draft methodology and latest guidance, the approach for local government can be summarised as:

- Local government leaders will be invited to nominate established leaders with relevant experience, operating at Director level or equivalent. NESO will make the final decision on board appointments.
- Up to 6 seats will be allocated to local government representatives, out of the 16 seats available per board. Where they exist, all Strategic Authorities will be invited to the board, and the remaining seats allocated among local councils.
- Members will represent the local government sector across their region, not an individual authority. They are asked to "speak collectively".
- Representatives are expected to remain stable through the RESP cycle (three years), even as local government structures evolve, however a named substitutes can be put forward.
- Representatives on each board may be either elected members or senior officers.
- Local government representatives, regardless of the number of individuals, will have a 50% share of the board votes.

- NESO will select from nominations, seeking a balance across different types of place and a range of social factors (which are not defined in the guidance).

These proposals have significant implications for local authorities. Firstly, local authorities will need to make a timely decision about who to nominate, taking into account their skill set and their ability to represent multiple local authorities. Uncoordinated nominations risk leaving some areas unrepresented or some representatives covering much wider geographical areas than others, which could be perceived as unfair. Secondly, local government representatives are likely to be most influential where they can work collaboratively to advocate for aligned, credible, coherent, well-evidenced priorities, potentially against competing visions from other sectors. Fragmented evidence, uncertain mandates and competing priorities may weaken the collective voice of local government representatives.

2.1.2. Local Authority and Thematic Working Groups

Supporting this proposed governance framework will be a local authority and four thematic Working Groups per region.

The latest guidance describes the Working Groups as a formal route to shape the RESP by bringing together local plans, priorities, evidence and constraints; testing emerging proposals; and advising the Strategic Board. The Working Groups will formally advise the Strategic Boards and meet at least quarterly.

The draft Terms of Reference for the Working Groups are to:

- support NESO to develop recommendations for the Strategic Boards and the GB Steering Committee
- test content and gather insights to inform updates to RESP products
- consider options, including ambition and feasibility, and explore potential approaches to address challenges
- support alignment with relevant stakeholders within nations and regions, and help surface trade-offs where they exist
- review the completeness of inputs and highlight issues or additional information that NESO should consider.

A local government Working Group is proposed, open to all strategic, county, district, metropolitan and unitary authorities within each region. While an explicit cap is not proposed, NESO notes that having more than 24 members may inhibit the group's effectiveness.

Other proposed Working Groups include consumer and commercial demand, generation, and industrial decarbonisation and transport.

The proposed methodology notes that NESO may use established means of collaboration to gather required inputs, rather than establishing new groups. It will also convene cross-sector roundtables to bring together representatives from each Working Group to consider issues

such as trade-offs. NESO states it will bring the views of the Working Groups together to ensure a whole system approach but does not clarify how this will work in practice.

For local authorities, a key implication of these proposals will be allocating sufficient officer time to enable effective contributions. NESO indicate that participants need to commit to approximately eight days over two years, but this figure may not fully reflect the preparation required. The latest guidance clarifies that local authorities are not expected to sit on multiple working groups or that there will be an advantage to doing so.

2.2. **Local Government Reorganisation**

The development of the RESP was anticipated to coincide with a period of major structural change for many English local authorities. Launched in December 2024 with the English Devolution White Paper, LGR describes the process in which the structure and responsibilities of local authorities are reconfigured. However, the process was paused by the Government for review in September 2026, and the likelihood and timescales for its restart are uncertain.

The anticipated reorganisation was going to affect two-tier authority areas and some smaller unitary authorities (for details of how the Greater South East would have been affected, see the supporting report, LGR and Devolution in the Greater South East: Mapping the implications for RESP).

Most local authorities received a written decision in July 2026. With the exception of Surrey which is on an accelerated programme, elections for the new councils were planned to be held in May 2027, with Vesting Day on 1 April 2028. These plans have since been withdrawn or paused.

LGR was expected to pose challenges for Strategic Board nominations and the development of RESP. Most stakeholder engagement, Strategic Boards and Working Groups will be held in 2027 before the new councils were planned to formally become operational (see RESP Roadmap). However, it is likely that local government representatives would have been anticipating the major structural changes in their decision-making and the elections may have shifted political priorities mid-year. Crucially, the final board decisions to approve the RESPs are expected in Q3 2028, after LGR was planned to be completed.

NESO's proposed methodology expects representatives to remain stable over the three-year RESP cycle, but if LGR restarts, it is highly likely that some individuals (e.g. county council executive directors) will be appointed to a different yet relevant role in a new unitary authority. It is unclear if NESO will accommodate any changes in individual's roles or if this will necessitate the recommencement of the appointment process at a late stage.

2.3. **Devolution**

In parallel to LGR, devolution is also underway across England, transferring powers and funding from national to local government. Areas are proceeding at different paces. The Government's aim is for all areas to be covered by a strategic authority by the end of 2028, as set out in the July 2026 Rewiring the State - Cabinet Statement. In the Greater South East, there are two established mayoral strategic authorities (MSA) and four regions are included in the Devolution Priority Programme (see the supporting report for details), with elections to be held in May 2028.

In the long term, devolution may strengthen the coordination of energy planning across local authorities. Recognising their highly relevant responsibilities for growth planning and infrastructure, the RESP methodology refers to the automatic invitation of strategic authorities to the Strategic Boards. However, "where they exist" is open to interpretation when new authorities are being formed during the RESP cycle. Existing in legislation is different to being fully operational, decision-making entities with a democratic mandate. NESO may clarify this in the methodology publication or nomination process briefing.[1]

2.4. **Spatial Development Strategies**

Following the Planning and Infrastructure Act, a new duty is being placed on strategic authorities (or where they do not exist, upper-tier and unitary authorities) to produce a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) by 2029. SDSs are intended to be 20-year spatial plans which enable sub-regions to meet housing needs and coordinate strategic infrastructure, supporting economic growth and climate resilience. 'Sensible geographies', aligned with devolution footprints where possible, are being consulted on. The development of SDS requires the formation of Strategic Planning Boards, and further guidance is expected in late 2026.

The updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in August 2026, states that SDS should set out the type, extent and broad location of strategic infrastructure, including renewable and low carbon energy and electricity networks, to enable development and serve existing communities. It requires local authorities to engage with utility providers and DNOs early when creating their local development plan, to inform understanding of existing energy supply and network capacity and requirements for additional infrastructure. The policy states that engagement should consider the impacts of planned growth, changing consumption patterns and climate change, as well as relevant plans, including the SSEP, CSNP and RESPs once published.

There is currently little detail on how RESPs and SDS are expected to interact, but both will entail the discussion of regional growth priorities and are likely to draw on similar evidence.

[1] In September 2026, NESO sent invitations to both established and emerging strategic authorities.

Sections 3 to 6: Confidential regional summaries

Section 7: Cross-regional themes

Emerging areas of consensus and divergence across the Greater South East

Summary

- **Strong alignment is seen between energy, growth and spatial planning.**
- **Most councils are seeking to use or adapt existing governance structures.**
- **Anticipated approaches to engagement are highly varied, with local authorities describing different levels of readiness in terms of county-wide governance arrangements, resourcing and evidence collation.**
- **Some authorities have considered how to collaborate as a RESP region to more effectively influence RESP outcomes in a credible and coherent way.**
- **RESP is coinciding with a time of major change for local government, including potential LGR, devolution and political change, affecting some areas acutely.**

7.1. Areas of consensus

Across the seven councils interviewed, themes emerged where there was considerable majority agreement, and sometimes full consensus:

- **Energy is increasingly viewed as a growth and spatial planning issue, rather than primarily a climate change issue**.
  All saw RESPs as being closely related to SDS development, with some expecting to harness the SDS geographies, data collection and governance processes to support RESP engagement.
- **Most are seeking to use or adapt existing council governance structures to support evidence gathering and decision making.**
  The scope of their groups vary, with many serving several functions (e.g. LAEP implementation, energy-related service delivery) and some serving broad place or climate remits.
- **Five out of seven interviewees favoured senior officer representation on the Strategic Boards**.
  Reasons cited included continuity through election cycles and the technical understanding needed.

- **Several councils recognised the need for additional region-level governance to meet the demands of RESP,** as local government board members are expected to represent their region, not solely their area. Wide-ranging functions that these governance processes would need to fulfil were mentioned, including preparing evidence, surfacing regional issues and exploring competing priorities from diverse perspectives, reaching consensus on regional priorities, contextualising energy planning for spatial and economic planning, strengthening infrastructure planning and developing data-sharing arrangements and commissioning LAEP actions.
- **Region-wide forums and organisations are few, except in transport** e.g. Transport for the South East, England's Economic Heartland.
- **By providing a consistent evidence base, LAEPs are seen as a useful foundation for RESP engagement.** However, it is not yet clear how they may be used in practice, especially as their quality and depth of evidence varies and not all issues discussed in LAEPs (e.g. fuel poverty, energy efficiency) are relevant to RESP. Furthermore, almost all existing and in-development LAEPs will not align with future council boundaries, and they may have to be split, combined or reworked.
- **There is widespread confusion around NESO's expectations regarding data and evidence.** This is not addressed in the guidance published in September 2026.
- **There is frustration at the perceived lack of transparency and delays in sharing information on governance arrangements.** This is felt to be undermining local authorities' ability to prepare. For example, the Strategic Board terms of reference are needed to identify if participation will be worthwhile and nominees' time will be justified. NESO has also not released details of how they will assess nominations.
- **Capacity constraints were often mentioned**, especially as energy planning is not a statutory duty.

7.2. Areas of divergence

The interviews also revealed where different approaches are being taken by authorities:

- **Readiness to engage with RESP varies widely between authorities.** Some are fairly advanced in their thinking about evolving governance structures and have potential nominees in mind, whereas others have limited awareness of the requirements. Levels of technical expertise, confidence and organisational capacity differ considerably, risking uneven representation and fragmentation.
- **Some authorities are taking a strategic view, focusing on proactively shaping governance arrangements.** Others are focused on preparing evidence to enable responses to data requests or participation in Working Groups.
- **Some areas can draw on established MSAs or influence an emerging MSA to support energy planning.**

For example, MSAs may assist by providing a strong governance structure, resourcing/funding to develop consistent evidence across LAs and offer continuity through LGR if it proceeds.

- **Political complexities and boundary uncertainties are more acute in some regions.**
  Issues with misaligned RESP, SDS and potential future unitary boundaries, shifting political support and delayed decisions are likely to cause unique challenges.
- **Securing a regional mandate is widely perceived to be necessary, however councils vary in how they think this should be done.**
  Some expect nominated individuals to have the necessary authority due to their position and experience, and existing governance structures to be sufficient, but others warn greater attention needs to be given to this early, especially given RESP and LGR timescales.
- **Each region is at a different stage in developing plans to coordinate all councils within the RESP region, to complement NESO governance structures.**
  Only [one region] has established structures to surface issues and identify a collective position. Options include establishing new forums hosted by an MSA or the GSENZH, expanding the remit of the sub-national transport bodies, or informal officer networks to inform individual briefings.
- **Regions vary in how much, if any, advance coordination will be undertaken for the Working Group nominations.**
  Based on the interviews held, only [one region] has begun the process of actively coordinating Working Group nominations to ensure a mix of skills and expertise (e.g. planning, infrastructure and housing) across the councils.
- **Only [one region] has considered future issues related to how officers will support the Strategic Board representatives.**
  For example, detailed briefings will be needed to enable representatives to scrutinise RESP proposals and be fully prepared for decisions.

Section 8: Possible roles for the GSENZH

Across the Greater South East, most local authorities are broadly supportive of the concept of RESP, recognising its value in connecting economic, climate and sustainable development ambitions. However, there is uneven preparedness to fully and confidently engage in the new process led by NESO. Many crucial, practical questions remain unanswered, such as about evidence requirements, nomination processes and decision-making responsibilities.

Drawing on the interviews, Regen has identified potential ways that the GSENZH could support local authorities as the development of the RESPs begins in earnest, subject to ongoing discussions with DESNZ. These activities would complement the first wave of Local Actor Support from NESO, expected in late autumn 2026.

Immediate actions (September 2026 to March 2027)

1. **Disseminate key updates:** Help local authorities understand key publications from NESO, such as the implications of NESO's finalised methodology (e.g. key changes, remaining gaps), and any briefings associated with the Strategic Board and Working Group nomination processes. This may be through concise briefings for council policy leads or one-to-one discussions, targeted where local authorities are considered less prepared, such as smaller unitaries.

2. **Build a comprehensive view:** Continue to engage with local authorities to better understand their support needs as the process develops, especially those under-represented in this research, such as existing unitaries, emerging MSAs and districts. For several authorities, the governance proposals discussed by interviewees are expected to be formalised this autumn. See the box below for further details related to this recommendation.

3. **Host best practice discussions:** Building on the online event to be held as part of this research, convene regular discussions on solutions to governance challenges, such as securing political mandates and evidence quality. The GSENZH Regional Advisory Boards (RABs) may offer an appropriate forum for discussions. There could also be benefits of hosting such discussions across multiple geographical scales: within regions, for all GSE authorities, between established and emerging MSA, or across RESP regions, in collaboration with other Net Zero Hubs.

4. **Advocate for greater clarity from NESO:** Continue to raise local authority concerns regarding data and evidence gathering, including responsibilities, coordination,

timings, formats, and the influence of data on decision-making. Other areas of uncertainty include the relationship between the Strategic Boards and Working Groups, and interactions between the different Working Groups.

Medium term (Dec 2026 – Dec 2027)

5. **Raise awareness among NESO team of the complexities facing local government:** As details of the Local Actor Support emerge, continue conversations with NESO to reiterate the impact of potential LGR and devolution, the importance of local government Strategic Board representatives securing a credible regional mandate, and why pan-regional conversations are necessary to strengthen the RESP governance processes. The hub could also encourage flexibility in approach, such as allowing representatives to change over time, any emerging gaps in skills/sector representatives to be filled, and to include relevant multi-council partnerships.

6. **Explore how SDS could support RESP:** many local authorities recognised the connectivity between SDS and RESP, yet there is no guidance available on the practicalities of this. GSENZH could seek to fill this gap, working with partners, such as the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and Local Government Association (LGA).

7. **Develop understanding of network business planning**: Strategic Board representatives and lead officers will need training on how the RESP will lead to investment in electricity network infrastructure. DNOs operate on a five year business cycle. Ofgem provide detailed guidance for DNOs to prepare business plans which Ofgem can accept or reject. The business plan includes the amount of 'load-related reinforcement' that DNOs will undertake to prepare their networks for growth. The RESP is a key input for agreeing the level of investment required. However, whilst the RESP guides network investment, regulations do not currently allow capacity to be reserved for a particular customer or use. The government has taken powers to identify strategic priorities in the connection process but not yet implemented these powers or confirmed the role of the RESP in that process.

8. **Develop practical resources:** As further details become available from NESO, consider where templates or toolkits could be valuable, recognising that each region is likely to have different needs. Examples could include managing datasets across local authorities or terms of reference for governance groups, or considerations/sample text to assist with briefings. This would complement existing Net Zero Hub resources produced through the NEEDS and Ready For RESP programmes.

9. **Champion stronger regional collaboration:** Currently, each region is proposing a different approach, with some recognising the importance of coordination in advance for consensus building and effective influencing. The hub could work with each region to bring together lead officers and champion coordination.

Developing more detailed governance processes

This research has focused on the formation of the Strategic Boards and Working Groups and initial plans for evidence gathering and potential regional coordination. This reflects the current stage of local authorities' thinking and the information available from NESO.

As the structure of RESPs becomes clearer, local authorities will need more detailed processes to underpin their input to key infrastructure decisions. A range of success criteria for such processes could be developed (e.g. efficiency of data collation, strength of regional mandate, continuity through LGR if it proceeds).

As each region presents distinctive challenges and timescales are tight, this analysis is likely to be more beneficial undertaken in close collaboration with relevant officers, rather than as a theoretical exercise to develop governance archetypes.

Further thought could also be given to the anticipated governance challenges likely to emerge through 2027. For example, regional processes may be needed between authorities to transparently manage conflicting perspectives. This may involve agreeing criteria for prioritising area needs and assessing outputs, clarifying mandates, and establishing escalation routes.

Local authorities may also wish to decide early how they will appraise the RESP plans in 2028 and reach their voting position.