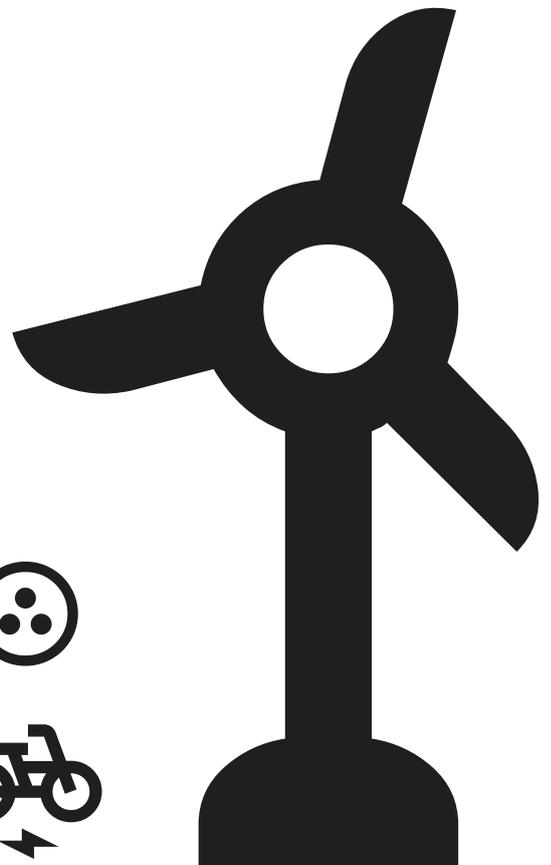


Building

Community

Power



How the public sector can collaborate with community energy to achieve scale in Greater Manchester



About Carbon Co-op

Carbon Co-op is a Greater Manchester-based community energy organisation that enables people and communities to work together to tackle climate change, with a particular focus on homes, housing and the built environment. Our approach includes pioneering and delivering new approaches and models to inspire action as well as working with stakeholders and clients to support the development of broader policy interventions and approaches.

About Regen

Regen is an independent, non-profit organisation working to transform the UK's energy system for a net zero future. They provide expert advice, market insights and research on decarbonising power, heat, and transport.

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Commissioned

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Published

February 2026

Full version of the report available from:
<https://carbon.coop/reports-and-publications>

Background

The Local Power Plan (2026) and launch of GB Energy Local constitute a significant commitment to community and municipal energy. Together, these initiatives create a unique opportunity to grow these sectors and forge new collaborations between them.

This report, commissioned by the **Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)**, explores how the region can meet its clean energy ambitions. It was produced by **Carbon Co-op** and **Regen**, with contributions from a wide range of industry stakeholders and policymakers.

The report identifies specific energy system opportunities for community energy, highlights key barriers to realising them and formulates enabling actions to unlock potential. Recommendations are informed by real-world case studies and new and emerging approaches.



Key recommendations for support and collaboration

- **Technical Support** - A new Greater Manchester Community Energy support and coordination network organisation.
- **Project Origination** - A match making service to broker relationships between community energy, local authority officers and site owners/developers.
- **Funding Support** - A new Greater Manchester Community Energy Fund grant to support the development of the sector.
- A social enterprise offer to support community building solar photovoltaic (PV) installations.
- **Commercial Partnerships** - Greater use of public sector power purchase agreements (PPAs) to support local clean generation.
- **Public-Commons Partnerships** - developing collaborative relationships, developing new Community Energy infrastructure to quickly scale the sector.
- Plus a range of holistic policy, convening and financial interventions.





The sector

The community energy sector involves local control and ownership of clean energy assets and delivery of energy services, with an emphasis on local economic benefit. Proponents highlight holistic environmental, social and economic impacts as well as the key role the sector plays in securing consent and legitimacy for the energy transition.

Greater Manchester's community energy sector is small and fairly atypical, split between a small, voluntary generation focussed sector operating rooftop solar and hydro projects, and two professionalised organisations (Carbon Co-op and People Powered Retrofit) focussing on energy services and retrofit - areas currently outside the scope of the Local Power Plan and GB Energy.

Taken on clean generation alone, the Greater Manchester sector is small in comparison to other regions (though similar to other northern, urban conurbations), but the organisations that exist are well governed with many indicating an ambition to grow in order to exploit new opportunities. Together, these organisations are well-placed to play a role in supporting the development of entrants into clean energy from the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector and beyond.

The municipal and policy context

Although a support framework for community energy exists at a national and regional level, there is a gap in coordination across the sector within the Greater Manchester city region. On the ground local authority officers are well-placed to support the sector and facilitate new projects, but lack time, capacity, and resources. GMCA can play a key role in creating a consistent support framework and maximise the effort of officers through coordination and city-region wide tools, resources, and policies.

Meanwhile, the national policy landscape is evolving quickly to support the development of clean power in general, and municipal and community energy approaches in particular. The Local Power Plan, GB Energy, local supply, shared ownership, grid connection reform, planning reform, energy planning reform and

the evolution of power purchase agreements are all likely to support the development of the GM community sector.

New generation opportunities

Regen's assessment of local community energy generation opportunities highlighted key areas, most significantly rooftop solar with a focus on (but not limited to) buildings for public good and community owned and managed buildings.

The availability of connection capacity and public land means that ground-mounted solar and wind projects under 5MW are a generation opportunity. Though recent GMCA research suggests project economics, the cost of capital and a lack of offtakers willing to pay premiums for local generation may be a limiting factor for this segment - although we continue to explore small projects through exempt supply arrangements.

National policy priorities around onshore wind and the key role of community benefit in enabling these, means that wind opportunities above 5MW are an area of interest. Likely legislative changes to mandate shared ownership, with a focus on projects over 5MW are another significant opportunity for community energy.



Key priorities

To inform recommendations, this report has drawn on a number of examples of good practice where the public sector has successfully supported the development of the community energy sector, most significantly in London and Bristol.

Based on this learning, establishing a Greater Manchester Community Energy support network organisation and flexible Greater Manchester Community Energy Fund grant is a key enabler to coordinate activity and actively grow the sector. A service to help community buildings install PVs has the potential to overcome issues around capacity to scale rooftop PV. A match making service addresses the lack of visibility of community energy which limits the ability for private, public, and community stakeholders to establish partnerships, including shared ownership, and exploit project opportunities. Finally, the huge purchasing potential of the public sector can be harnessed through increasing use of power purchase agreements within the city region.

The case for Community Energy

As the Local Power Plan sets out, there is now a clear rationale for the development of community energy as part of the push towards Clean Power 2030, with the sector offering a number of unique advantages:

- **Local Trust and Access** – it is well recognised that trusted, co-operative and non-profit community energy groups help unlock rooftops and gain acceptance where national players cannot.
- **Social Licence, Faster Delivery** – Local ownership helps reduce objections, speeds consenting and ensures projects are valued well after ribbon-cutting.
- **Targeted Benefits / Fuel Poverty Focus** – Surpluses stay local: warmer homes, lower bills for the hardest-hit, and local jobs. Programmes can prioritise energy advice, energy efficiency and tariffs for vulnerable households.
- **Local Flexibility and grid support** – Community schemes can coordinate heat pumps, EVs and batteries to provide flexibility and defer costly grid upgrades.



- **Local Fundraising and participation** – Groups can raise and access local capital. Residents become owners and operators, turning the energy transition into something done with people, not to them.
- **Co-operation over competition** – Community energy augments utility-scale build-out and public programmes, multiplying impact.

Timeframe for action

With the release of the Local Power Plan, the time for action is now. Based on research and stakeholder engagement a long list of recommendations has been prioritised into a timeline to inform implementation. Taken together these recommendations form a holistic action plan, with involvement from across the public sector to establish and grow the community energy sector in Greater Manchester.





Recommendations Timeline

Groundwork and quick wins: 12 months

Formalising collaboration

1. Convening a community energy taskforce/working group to coordinate action and develop a strategic plan for the city region.
2. GMCA policy commitments to support the development of the CE sector and shared ownership approaches.
3. Providing seed funding and support for the creation of a support and coordination network organisation for community energy in Greater Manchester.
4. Integrating community energy targets and priorities into the Regional Energy Strategic Plan (RESP).
5. Developing immediate public-commons partnership opportunities



Building evidence and tools for the sector

6. Commissioning a buildings solar PV potential mapping exercise and making the data publicly available to CE groups.
7. Exploring the feasibility for sleeved pool PPAs to be deployed in Greater Manchester.
8. Resourcing the creation of standardised legal templates for use by community energy organisations (e.g. for PPAs, maintenance agreements, Leases etc. and standard clauses to meet additional Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) requirements).

Building on the foundations: 1-2 years

Unblocking planning barriers

12. Encouraging harmonised Greater Manchester-wide planning guidance to help facilitate community energy schemes & encouraging local authority planning policies to incorporate suggestions for developers to explore shared ownership opportunities with the community energy sector.

Further developing the support infrastructure

9. Commissioning an options analysis into the establishment of a city regional GM Community Energy Fund grant to support feasibility/core/start-up stage funding for the CE sector.
10. Supporting the development of a centralised, replicable support social enterprise offer around a range of community energy models.
11. Developing a match making service and local authority officer support to broker relationships between community energy and site owners/developers. The success of this recommendation may also be influenced by the solar PV potential mapping exercise.

Longer-term goals: 2 years+

13. GMCA entering into long term, public sector PPAs with community energy groups

14. Further exploring innovation opportunities from public-commons partnerships to maximise the scale and benefits of community energy projects.

Community Ownership

Immediate Opportunities

The interim findings of this research has informed the development of public-commons partnership opportunities between community energy and GMCA.

Schools Solar Joint Venture

GMCA is developing a new delivery model for school energy decarbonisation with community energy involvement. A new ESCO Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) that will offer financed decarbonisation interventions into schools including solar, heat and energy efficiency the partnership will create a vehicle for the delivery of community funding.

Manchester Community Capital

Advocating and engaging is a key strength of community energy and leveraging this to raise funds locally that are otherwise difficult to access is a big opportunity. GMCR has been particularly successful at raising local finance. In 2026, the North West Net Zero Hub, GMCA, Carbon Co-op and GMCR will work together to develop this capability in the form of place-based fundraising and delivery models.



Electrification



Water Power



Finance



Electric Car



Heat Pump



Sensors



Diversity



Electric Bike



Nature People



Library



School



Public



Wind Power



Solar Power



Electric Meter



Energy Saving



Community



Volunteer Activism

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