



My story...

## Mareike Schmidt

Service manager – Energy  
Bristol City Council

A visionary woman who has spearheaded Bristol City Council's highly successful European Local Energy Assistance (ELENA) programme, while also championing the role of women in the UK renewable energy sector.

After completing her MA at the University of Bamberg in Germany, Mareike began working on European and international affairs and spent time in Brussels and at Leeds City Council, before joining Bristol City Council as European and regional officer in 2007.

During her time at Bristol City Council, Mareike has used her knowledge and experience of European funding to help steer the council to success in the ELENA programme. Her passion for the municipal energy model has helped shape Bristol's energy strategy and infrastructure developments, leading to them establishing their own truly sustainable energy company business model.

While delivering the ideas and investment that have pushed energy up the city's overall agenda, she has also built up a 25-strong team, which she now manages. Mareike initially assumed that, because she didn't have an engineering background, she would only oversee the programme until a manager was appointed. This was not the case, however, and the resilience which has kept her at the head of the programme since then is a source of real pride for Mareike.

“Delivering the investment programme has been far from easy but I stick to what I'm doing and I've been successful despite some challenging circumstances. I'm also proud of my involvement in the council's development of this totally new business model in the UK, and the fact that the municipal energy company idea is now a reality.”

This success has also been an opportunity and catalyst for Mareike to develop greater self-confidence within a sector that has historically not benefitted from the most gender-balanced composition: “There were, unfortunately, times when people made assumptions or had preconceptions about me or my role”, she recalls, “such as when people presumed that my male colleague was my manager, when it was actually the other way around.”

Mareike embraced these challenges as an opportunity, however, and feels like their effect has been positive in the long run: “Things like that actually pushed me to adopt a slightly different style and to get myself out there, talking about what I do. I realised quite early on that I was often the only woman on the panel, so I've always accepted invitations to speak and have pushed myself to do it as often as I can. The confidence I enjoy now has come with experience.”

Mareike is keen to help other women gain the same experience-driven confidence, while addressing the gender and ethnicity imbalances which she has experienced throughout her time in the energy sector. She enjoys coaching the women in her team and believes in the importance of them presenting well, while not being afraid of saying 'I've achieved this'.

**“Women need to be encouraged to move into the energy sector and I would like to be a champion for anyone who wants to join the industry.”**

“I particularly coach younger women and often take work placements,” she explains, “encouraging them to stick to it and get the experience. They often get jobs with energy companies and in the renewable energy sector but it needs that initial encouragement when they start out. With the women in my team I help them gain confidence by making sure that they present and don't step back, as well as encouraging them to take on more project management responsibility.”

When asked about who has inspired and encouraged Mareike throughout her career, she praises the strong female leadership of the council and the women she meets at events such as the Powerful Women network and Regen's EWIRE initiative. “It's good to have these women as role models”, she explains, “particularly Dorothy Thompson (CEO of DRAX Group), Nina Skorupska (CEO of the UK Renewable Energy Association) and Juliet Davenport (CEO of Good Energy).”

**“I am hoping that, by leading by example and sponsoring high potential women in my team, I can help them gain confidence in securing their next, more senior roles and build the pipeline for the future.”**

In addition to securing funding for smaller, local community-led projects, Mareike now manages large-scale infrastructure projects in the energy sector and has led on major schemes such as the electric vehicle programme, the installation of solar panels on a wide range of public sector buildings (including Bristol's Ashton Gate stadium, the NHS maternity unit and the Lawrence Weston solar farm), and also the insulation of private and social homes in Bristol.

Mareike has also contributed to the gender balanced board composition of Bristol Energy through her promotion of the 'Women on Board' organisation and was proud to be named South West Sustainable Energy Champion at Regen's 2016 Green Energy Awards. She is also Chair of Bristol Community Energy Fund's grant funding panel.

Mareike will soon be taking on a new role as Head of operations for Q-bot, a company that works with robotic devices to remotely apply insulation without needing to take the building apart.