



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 1 July 2024 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present In Person

Councillor Andrew Burrow (Chair)
Councillor Vera Waters (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Naeem Akhtar
Councillor Jeszemma Howell
Councillor Cathy Bayton
Councillor Diane Donaldson
Councillor Ellen Fenton
Councillor Ian Kettle
Councillor Gareth Moore

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Coventry City Council
City of Wolverhampton Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Association of Black Country Authorities
Birmingham City Council

In Attendance

Dr. Fiona Aldridge
Ben Colman
Helene Dearn

Dan Essex
Lyndsey Roberts
Jaspal Seehra
Janna Simpson
Kieran Stockley
Kate Taylor

Head of Insight and Intelligence
Head of Development and Delivery
Director for Employment Skills Health
and Communities
Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Head of Insight and Intelligence
Governance Services Officer
Head of Legal Services
Head of Finance Business Partnering
and Strategic Planning

**Item Title
No.**

1. Appointment of Chair

The Governance and Scrutiny Manager opened the meeting and explained that following the election of the Mayor of the West Midlands in May, and in order to comply with legislation relating to combined authorities, the chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had to be of a different political party to the Mayor.

At its meeting on 14 June, the WMCA Board agreed that the chairs of the WMCA's committees should be appointed by each of the committees themselves. Nominations were received from Councillor Andrew Burrow and Councillor Ian Kettle. The committee appointed Councillor Andrew Burrow as Chair for 2024/25, with 7 votes in favour.

Resolved:

Councillor Andrew Burrow be appointed as Chair of the WMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee for 2024/25.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

The appointment of Vice-Chair was the responsibility of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and had to be a member from a different political party to the Mayor. It was proposed that Councillor Vera Waters be appointed as Vice-Chair of this committee for 2024/25, which was seconded by Councillor Ian Kettle.

Resolved:

Councillor Vera Waters be appointed as Vice-Chair of the WMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee for 2024/25.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jamie Tennant (Birmingham), Councillor Philip Batman MBE (Wolverhampton), and Councillor Ewan Mackey (Birmingham).

4. Terms of Reference

The committee considered its Terms of Reference.

Resolved:

The committees Terms of Reference be noted.

5. Schedule of Meetings 2024/25

The Chair asked members to review the schedule and ensure attendance or arrange substitutes, if necessary, to maintain a quorum.

Resolved:

The schedule of meeting be noted.

6. Minutes - 4 March 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2024, were agreed as a correct record.

7. Matters Arising

- (a) **Brownfield Land Remediation Fund – Scrutiny Review Update**
(minute no. 186 refers)

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer reported that the report of the Brownfield Land Remediation Fund Task and Finish Review Group, would be deferred to the September meeting for further refinement

before submission to the WMCA Board.

8. Skills Scrutiny Review: Progress Report on the implementation of the recommendations arising from the review

The committee considered a report of the Director for Employment Skills Health and Communities on the progress made on the implementation of the recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee that were supported by the Skills Advisory Board on 25 September 2023.

The 2023 scrutiny review focused on the impact of the devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) to the WMCA and produced four recommendations. The Head of Insight and Intelligence explained that the functional strategy for adult skills had been drafted for the single settlement agreed in the regulation deal and local authorities were creating place-based strategies for the investment. A well-received workshop on employment skills strategy and investment was highlighted and councillors were invited to visit local construction provision sites to see the initiatives in action.

Councillor Ian Kettle raised the need for earlier career advice in schools. The Head of Insight and Intelligence responded that the Combined Authority adds value through activities like work experience and career fairs, despite limited funding. Councillor Cathy Bayton praised the Job Rotation pilot in Coventry, which supports staff upskilling and the Director for Employment Skills, Health, and Communities stressed the importance of local employer engagement for the success of such programs. It was agreed that an update would be available by March 2025, with a preliminary report on the pilot including the participating employment sectors would be presented to the committee in November 2024.

The Chair highlighted the difference in higher education budget allocation, suggesting that part of the £134 million might be better used for early career advice in schools. The Head of Insight and Intelligence explained that the AEB was restricted to individuals aged 19 and over, with ongoing discussions about potentially extending the offering of the 16 - 18 year-olds budget.

The Head of Insight and Intelligence noted the fragmented nature of career support, including the National Career Service and youth hubs and the idea to integrate such resources. The Chair requested a detailed report on funding coordination, which the Head of Insight and Intelligence agreed to provide.

Councillors raised concerns about the complexity of career services, noting the involvement of multiple organisations as well as the offering of some school delivering work experience to year nine students. The Head of Insight and Intelligence agreed, emphasising the focus on strategic collaboration with entities like the National Career Service and DWP she also emphasised the importance of meaningful work experience and consistent opportunities across the region.

Councillor Jeszemma Howl enquired about the work experience and career

advice pilot in Coventry, focusing on workforce gaps and gender disparities. The Head of Insight and Intelligence responded that the pilot's success relies on employer participation and engagement in sectors with gender disparities in careers such as Early Years and Social Care.

Councillors voiced concerns about fragmented funding for career services and emphasised the need for better integration to address long-term unemployment. The Head of Insight and Intelligence explained that the AEB supports inclusive communities, basic education, career progression, upskilling and reskilling. The Director for Employment Skills, Health, and Communities added that the WMCA was developing a place-based strategy to tailor investment to specific community needs, and utilised various funding sources to build trust with community partners. It was acknowledged that long-term unemployed individuals faced challenges such as financial insecurity and mental health issues and that comprehensive solutions were being developed through community partnerships to address these challenges.

Councillor Joanna Kane enquired about benefits for non-constituent members. The Head of Insight and Intelligence clarified that while the AEB was for WMCA area residents, the national government funds skills training was nationwide. In order to assist developing a joined-up approach, the WMCA would share successful strategies with other authorities and the Department of Education. She emphasised the importance of strong partnerships with employers and entities like the DWP for success beyond the WMCA area.

Resolved:

- (1) The progress made and next steps on the implementation of the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Skills Scrutiny Review be noted;
- (2) An initial report on the progress being made with the job rotation pilot in Coventry including the participating employment sectors to be submitted to Overview & Scrutiny Committee in November 2024, with a final evaluation report and the potential for its roll-out to be submitted March 2025.
- (3) A report on the region's career offer to include information in relation to the organisations that operated this area, funding and how it linked with the all-age careers strategy to be submitted to a future meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

9. Performance monitoring against the Annual Business Plan

The committee considered a report of the Performance Manager that provided an overview of the monitoring and reporting process for this fiscal year's Annual Business Plan.

Councillor Cathy Bayton asked whether any KPIs need to change in light of the new mayoral manifesto. The Performance Manager explained that the KPIs were identified by Executive Directors and were reviewed continuously,

with potential changes occurring if business needs changed. Councillor Cathy Bayton emphasised the need for tangible KPIs for housing and requested feedback on whether these could be more measurable. The Performance Manager assured members that while the current KPIs were being reviewed, he would feedback members comments with regard to housing for consideration.

Councillor Gareth Moore expressed concern over the lack of detailed breakdown of the 25 red and amber indicators from last year's performance and enquired as to what measures were in place to address them this year. This concern was acknowledged, and it was agreed that more detailed information on these indicators would be provided as the year progressed.

Councillor Ellen Fenton echoed the need for more detailed information on the KPIs and considered that the broad overviews were insufficient for effective scrutiny to be undertaken. The Chair agreed and proposed that a small working group should be formed to specify the required report details. Mark Smith, the Independent Chair of the Audit, Risk, & Assurance Committee, offered to join the group to enhance coordination and feedback.

Resolved:

- (1) The proposed method for monitoring the Annual Business Plan for 2024/25 and the assurances it provides to manage performance was endorsed.
- (2) Areas of interest that could form part of members' future work programme were considered; and
- (3) A scrutiny group to be established to undertake a review of performance reporting and key information to enable effective scrutiny.

10. Grant Register

The committee considered a report of the Financial Planning & Co-Ordination Manager on the grants received and utilised by the WMCA. The grant register contained all current 'live' grants where the WMCA was the accountable body and captured a comprehensive total of grants, awarding body, time period for delivery.

Upon questioning, clarification was given on the Brexit Grant and how it was used to assist businesses as a result of Brexit. The effectiveness of funds allocated, especially for electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, was also discussed with the potential for pilot projects to address charging needs for homes without easy access.

Resolved:

The updates to the grant register be noted

11. Work Programme

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer presented the current work programme and WMCA's forward plan.

Resolved:

The committees work programme be noted, subject to the inclusion of a future item focussing on a programme to support those with health conditions into work and investment zones projects.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held Monday 2 September 2024 at 10:00am.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am.