



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 13 March 2023 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Cathy Bayton (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Burrow
Councillor Ian Kettle
Councillor Nigel Lumby

Association of Black Country Authorities
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Shropshire Non-Constituent Local
Authorities

Councillor Martin McCarthy
Councillor Jackie Taylor
Amanda Tomlinson

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Black Country Local Enterprise
Partnership

In Attendance

Steve Bowyer

Partnerships and Engagement Strategic
Lead

Dan Essex
Cheryl Hiles
Lyndsey Roberts
Laura Shoaf
Kate Taylor

Governance Services Manager
Director of Energy Capital
Scrutiny Officer
Chief Executive
Head of Finance Business Planning and
Strategic Planning

Councillor Vera Waters (MS Teams)

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

**Item Title
No.**

119. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Naeem Akhtar (Coventry), Councillor Mike Chalk (Redditch), Councillor Mike Sutherland (Cannock) and Councillor Paul Sweet (Wolverhampton).

120. Inquorate Meeting

The meeting was inquorate and therefore decisions taken at the meeting would be deferred to the next meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 10 July 2023 for formal approval.

121. Chair's Remarks

The Chair reflected on the activities of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee during 2022/23 and thanked the members of the committee for their support and cross-party contributions during the year.

122. Minutes - 12 January 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

123. Matters Arising

(a) Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal

The Chief Executive provided an update on the negotiations with the Government to finalise the trailblazer deeper devolution deal. It was anticipated that an announcement by Government would be made in the Spring Budget.

(b) Site Visit to Green Square Accord

It was agreed that a site visit to Green Square Accord would be arranged for the committee during 2023/24, as a low carbon homes manufacturer.

(c) Future Homes Strategy

At its January meeting, members proposed that a wider session with members and local authority officers should be held to encourage the proactive utilisation of the opportunities available to deliver speedy, affordable and carbon neutral housing. The Chair requested a progress update to be provided prior to the next meeting of the committee.

(d) Scrutiny Review: The Impact of the Delivery of Local Skills Training

Members received an update on the progress being made with the Skills Scrutiny Review that examined the impact and outcomes that had been delivered through the Adult Education Budget. The review panel had sought a range of written and verbal evidence to help inform the review. The interviews with key witnesses had now concluded and it was anticipated that a report on the conclusions and recommendations arising from the review would be submitted to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in early 2023/24, prior to its submission to the Skills Advisory Board for consideration.

124. Mayoral Question Time: Budget - Response from the Mayor to the observations presented to the WMCA Board on 13 January 2023

The committee received a response in respect of the observations it had identified following the Mayoral Q&A session on 15 December 2022, based on the WMCA's proposed draft budget 2023/24.

Regarding arms' length companies, it was considered that there needed to be a greater scrutiny focus on arms' length companies and the outputs delivered for the region. The Chair agreed to liaise with the Chair of Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee to discuss this matter further.

Resolved:

- (1) The response be noted.

125. WM2041 - UPDATE

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Strategy, Integration & Net Zero on the progress being made by the WMCA as part of the region's aspirations to become a net zero region by 2041.

In 2019 the WMCA declared a climate emergency and set out its vision to make the West Midlands net zero by 2041. In 2021, the WMCA developed the first of its 'Five Year Plan' (2021 – 2026) to get to 2041. This was a comprehensive and evidenced plan that set out the practical measures required to meet a range of trajectories to achieve the net zero goal.

The committee discussed and shared comments on local area energy planning, supporting renewables and the WMCA's technical competency to support the business community to reduce their carbon footprint. Whilst it was recognised that the WMCA had created a supportive environment for businesses to share and learn from each other on their journey to reaching net zero, it was important for the WMCA to also understand the obstacles and barriers for the business community.

With regards to home insulation, it was considered that work needed to be undertaken to ensure that the appropriate supply chains provided products, services, information, and guidance that residents could trust. The importance of the WMCA's ethical global responsibility was also highlighted and the need for it to be acutely aware that its route to achieving decarbonisation did not have any unintended consequences.

Resolved:

- (1) The progress being made with the delivery of the Five Year Plan be noted; and
- (2) The observations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee regarding the need for work to be undertaken to ensure that the appropriate supply chains provided products, services, information and guidance that local residents could trust in relation to insulating their homes, the WMCA to be aware of the obstacles for the business community to reaching net zero and the importance of the UK's impact on the developing world and how this could be made more visible within reports, be noted.

126. WMCA Scrutiny 2023/24 - Ways of Working

The Chair summarised the way in which the committee had undertaken its work programme during the year and discussed potential changes that could be imbedded to improve the scrutiny function going forward.

This year, the WMCA had been instrumental in setting up the new Combined Authorities Scrutiny Chair's Forum that enabled the chairs from the ten combined authorities' scrutiny committees to meet to share best practice and discuss areas of common interest.

The committee considered that regular training opportunities for members, early engagement with the Executive Board, greater scrutiny of the WMCA's

Portfolio Lead Members and greater citizen engagement in the scrutiny process was important, and a clear focus on performance, outcome and metric information that could be examined by the committee.

In addition, it was added that “with greater powers comes with greater accountability” and members recognised that there was a strong focus by the Government on the creation of strong scrutiny within combined authorities.

Resolved:

- (1) The comments be noted.

127. Grant Register

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance & Business Hub that provided an update on the grant register which 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 and a description of what the grant delivered.

The Chair enquired about the way in which the Social Housing Fund of £14.9m would be devolved to local authorities. The Chief Executive reported that the Mayor and Portfolio Lead Members were in dialogue as to how this fund would be allocated.

The committee received an update on the scoping of the Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund, a £70m resource investment that the WMCA would be granted by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport. At its meeting in December 2022, the WMCA Board agreed that the fund was to be allocated across four thematic pillars relating to economy, trade and tourism (£38.9m), culture and heritage (£4.07m), inclusive communities (£20.8m) and wellbeing and sustainability (£4.07m). The WMCA had been working with local authorities and stakeholder groups to shape the programmes and dialogue continued with the Mayor and Portfolio Lead Members. A further report would be presented to the WMCA Board on 17 March 2023.

Amanda Tomlinson sought assurances that the individual funds would generate additionality within the region and would not be utilised to alleviate funding pressures elsewhere. She asked whether the committee could receive a report on the comprehensive programme that detailed the initiatives that the funds would be spent on. The Chief Executive assured the committee that the business case for all programmes would be subject to review by the WMCA’s Investment Board but also welcomed scrutiny’s oversight.

[Amanda Tomlinson declared a prejudicial interest in this item, as Chief Executive of the Black Country Housing Group].

Resolved:

- (1) The Grant Register be noted; and

- (2) A report on the Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund's four thematic programmes that detailed the individual initiatives, timescales and funds be presented to a future meeting of the committee in 2023/24.

128. Minutes: Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee - 6 February and 16 February 2023

The committee received the minutes of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee's held on 6 February and 16 February 2023.

Resolved:

- (1) The minutes of the meetings held on 6 February and 16 February be agreed.

129. Work Programme

The committee received a draft work programme of items that were to be considered at future meetings of the committee.

Resolved:

- (1) The draft work programme of items to be considered at future meetings be noted.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm.